

BLUEPRINT

Issue 3 | Volume 85 | November 2024



Examining the causes and implications
of the closed-campus policy

Behind the scenes of cover's art

As Senior Graphics Editors, we follow the development of cover stories as we make the graphics to support them. As we listened to the stories of students who “evaded” admin, Chick-fil-A in hand, it was hard not to imagine the Acalanes closed campus chronicles as an episode of a detective TV show. With those TV shows in mind, the first thing we came up with when brainstorming for a cover image was a detective bulletin board: map, polaroids, red string and all.

The bulletin board as a whole holds items layered with meaning beyond their simple appearance. Push pins and thumbtacks represent the efforts, by students and admin alike, to pin down the root cause of a spike in the number of students leaving campus. Different fence locations in the photographs are places where attempted getaways have been carried out, sometimes succeeding. As for the red string, it exemplifies not only connections among different escape routes, but also the complexity of the issue across the school.

To see more selected photos from our cover photo shoot turn to page 20.

Sof Cerruti & Justin Rosenblatt, Senior Graphics Editors

Sof Cerruti *Justin Rosenblatt*

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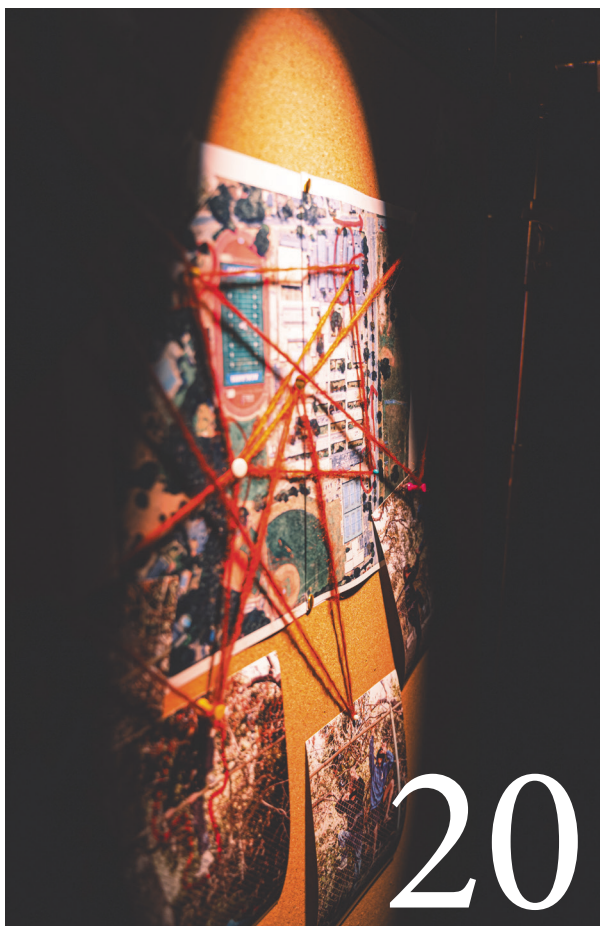
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NEWS



Pink Power: Promoting Pinktober

Lafayette community unites for Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Emily Roberts, Grace Wolpert, Mila Ellis, and
Maddie Obertello | Print Feature Editor, Arts Copy Editor,
and Staff Writers

Photos by Isaac Topp and Emily Roberts

Breast cancer affects millions, but every action to support those diagnosed can have a huge impact. Turning awareness into action can inspire hope for a future where everyone is seen and supported.

Community members came together to recognize Breast Cancer Awareness Month and highlight the importance of regular screening. Throughout October, Acalanes hosted a variety of events designed to educate students plus raise awareness and support for Breast Cancer Awareness. On Oct. 3, 9, 10, and 11 the women's tennis, water polo, and volleyball, and men's football teams donned vibrant shades of pink and hosted bake sales to raise funds for breast cancer research. In the broader Lafayette community, the recently approved Cancer Support Community (CSC) is planning to build a new cancer support center, providing resources for those affected.

While many know what breast cancer is, many still do not know that there are vari-

ous factors involved such as genetics, one's environment, and other unknown causes.

"Breast cancer develops because breast cells mutate and start to grow uncontrollably. Some patients inherit specific genes that prevent their cells from repairing mutations which increase their chances of developing cancer. However, we only detect these inherited mutations in about five to ten percent of our patients. For most patients, we do not detect an inherited mutation and the cause is unknown. Most likely the cause is multifactorial including environmental factors and personal factors," University of California San Francisco Professor of Medicine and Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center Medical Director of Breast Oncology Dr. Jo Chien said.

Breast cancer can affect an individual in various ways, and to combat this issue, researchers and doctors are constantly expanding their knowledge of its various forms to accurately treat it.

"Breast cancer is not one disease. [There are] many different diseases, and it is critical to understand the biology of each patient's tumor to know how best to treat it ... Breast cancer usually requires a multi-disciplinary approach, including surgery, radiation, [and] systemic therapy. Depending on the type of breast cancer, we use hormonal treatment, chemotherapy, immunotherapies, and targeted therapies," Dr. Chien said.

To stand in solidarity for Breast Cancer Awareness Month, also referred to as Pinktober, Acalanes fall sports teams participated in pink dress-ups.

"The pink-out game where the team has a pink-out dress up brings awareness to people who might not know that it's Breast Cancer Awareness [month]. Also, dressing up pink for the game shows people who have been affected by breast cancer in the community that they are supported and seen," varsity water polo player and junior Ella Del Rosario said.

On Oct. 10, the women's volleyball team hosted their annual Dig Pink event, created in 2019 to support the breast cancer cause. Each year, the program donates their proceeds to a cause that directly supports breast cancer, whether it is to a patient or to research efforts working to find cures.

"100 percent of our proceeds are donated to local women, organizations that fund research, and groups that provide financial assistance and accessible services to women in need. This year, we donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF). This organization funds over 260 researchers who work to prevent and find a cure for breast cancer," volleyball parent and volunteer Gina Hageboeck said.

The football team also got involved in Breast Cancer Awareness Month by hosting a pink-out game on Oct. 11. Players and fans alike dressed in all shades of pink to demonstrate solidarity.

"The team dressed with pink incorporated in our attire as a part of a coordinated effort to spread awareness for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Some players [wore] the pink ribbon insignia on arm bands or sleeves and almost all players [wore] some form of pink in their clothing," varsity football player and junior Bryce Birdsong said.

Prior to the game at the "pink-out" tailgate, the Baking a Difference Club ran a bake sale to contribute toward breast cancer research and education.

"We organized a bake sale for the pink-out tailgate to raise money for breast cancer research. We sold pink-themed treats like

sugar cookies and cupcakes to get students hyped for the football game,” Baking a Difference Club President and senior Rachel Feldman said.

At halftime, the Acalanes Mini Dons performed a combined routine, incorporating pink into their attire.

“The [Mini Dons] uniforms included a cheer skirt, a white crew neck with Acalanes Mini Dons written on it, pink pom [poms], and a pink bow. These uniforms were focused [on] the breast cancer awareness theme for that game and taught the girls a lot about the importance of the cause,” Varsity Cheer captain and senior Ruby Robinson said.

Efforts to support those impacted by breast cancer goes beyond fostering a sense of connection and also acknowledges that the journey does not end with treatment and can emphasize the importance of ongoing support as a community.

“The breast cancer awareness events create tremendous school spirit and unity among the students, staff, families, and local businesses, joining together to support a significant cause. The atmosphere at the games and around campus is electric, with so much energy and positivity surrounding breast cancer awareness,” Hageboeck said.

While Acalanes sports teams dress in pink to show support, many find it important to understand that showing support for breast cancer should go beyond wearing a certain color.

“I think that in a way organizations have kind of glamorized the pink, like everyone knows October is pink and I think it is great. I think my hope also is that people take steps to build their awareness about it and also contribute so that if or when people are affected they can access all the resources,” Activities Director and Ethnic Studies teacher Katherine Walton said.

As Acalanes continues to unite together in the fight against breast cancer, other initiatives in the Bay Area are also working to provide support for those affected by all forms of cancer. The San Francisco Bay Area CSC provides support and resources to those impacted by cancer and works to break down barriers.

CSC is currently securing permits to build a new support center in Lafayette. The building, once completed, will be 12,000 square feet and two stories tall. It will be built on an undeveloped six-acre lot next to the Lafayette Reservoir that was gifted to the organization.

“The CSC wanted to find a new space to show the importance of nature in the mission of our services. We came across



this piece of property and [were going] to purchase it [but] the private owner ... gifted the parcel to CSC,” CSC Director of Donor Support and Capital Campaign Libby Eppinga said.

Once completed, the CSC will provide various programs to help strengthen the community of those affected by cancer.

“The new cancer support center will be a continuation of what we currently offer: nutrition classes in a state-of-the-art demonstration kitchen, movement classes in a room that expands outside to enjoy nature while in practice, support groups and counseling, book and garden classes, programs for teens and kids whose parents have cancer and so much more,” Eppinga said.

The CSC creators also hope it will provide a place for the broader community to come together in the fight against cancer.

“We could work with the Lafayette Community Garden across the street to help preserve the natural form of the land. Rotary Clubs could build benches for contemplation and meditation. Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts could assist with maintenance projects or sell Christmas trees on the property. High schools may be interested in volunteer hours at the new cancer support center. We could [also] work with the Lamorinda Villages aging community in tandem as cancer is a disease of aging,” Eppinga said.

As a community, contributing to the fight against breast cancer can provide a supportive atmosphere for those struggling with the disease. Lamorinda as a whole is unified in raising awareness for this cause and those who have been affected.

“Our community is already doing a great job. For those who know people affected

by breast cancer, support them by checking in with them. Many patients continue to have a hard time with side effects and have a hard time coping with the diagnosis months and years after the acute treatment phase is over. The thing is that it is not over for these patients and they need continued support from loved ones beyond the initial diagnosis,” Dr. Chien said.

Providing unconditional support, regardless of personal experience with the disease, can be helpful for the patient's recovery experience. Helping to raise awareness or advocate for breast cancer whether it is personal or not can make improvements for a large majority of those impacted.

“It often takes cancer affecting someone we love for us to realize how much we need to step up. We should be organizing workshops, teaming up with health organizations, and creating more spaces for people to find answers or just feel supported—whether it's five years down the line or 25. It's so important to know you're not alone in this,” Acalanes parent Jane Smith said.

To continue showing support for those impacted by cancer, community members can continue coming together in engaging and meaningful ways all year long to foster a shared sense of purpose in impacting others' lives.

“I am grateful; well, we all are thankful to be part of a community where we join together to raise awareness, learn more about important causes, donate money, and participate in critical philanthropic projects. These events highlight the importance of being part of something bigger than ourselves, and we share the pride of making a difference in the lives of others,” Hageboeck said.

Moving Beyond the Ballot

Profiling the 2025-2029 AUHSD Board Candidates

Hanna Wiśniewska and Cypress Reid | Social Media Manager and Staff Writer

The Lafayette community voted for two out of the five board member candidates on Nov. 5. The two candidates with the most votes will become a part of the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Board and serve for the next four years. The governing board is widely responsible for the regulation and oversight of the AUHSD.

The board meets every first and third Wednesday of the month and discusses topics involving school and district wide issues. The board holds both closed sessions that are exclusive to elected board members and open sessions which are open to the public, where the community is invited to comment on the issues discussed.

"The school board includes five elected members of the public who provide oversight over the school district. Specifically, they're in charge of school policies, approving curriculum, approving budgets, approving collective bargaining agreements," AUHSD Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson said.

The elected members will listen to students, parents, and staff, and work together with the current board members to manage the AUHSD. In making informed decisions, the members research the discussed topics and bring openness and critical thinking to the decisions they face.

"The individual board members have no power, but collectively a majority of the board has a lot of power in terms of the policies, curriculum, who the employees are, who the superintendent is, and budget decisions, collective bargaining," Dr. Nickerson said.

Peter Catalano



Courtesy Photo/Peter Catalano

Peter Catalano has been a lawyer for the past ten years, representing clients before the California Public Utilities Commission. Catalano has prior experience in education, working as a substitute teacher in California and a school board member for the North Colonie Central School District in New York. If elected, Catalano looks to revise the current curriculum in order to better prepare students for life outside of school, with emphasis on skills such as balancing checkbooks, understanding the inner workings of the government, and how taxes work.

"I've been on a school board back

east, and I've been on several other boards, I've worked for a commission for a long 30 something years, I have all sorts of experience that I think is relevant in dealing with capital budgets and planning," Catalano said.

Catalano plans to involve himself further in the community by upholding the current standard of management of the board.

"I'm not looking to make a lot of changes as a board member, I think the board is pretty well run from what I can tell, I'm looking more to just work collaboratively with people," Catalano said.

Paul Chopra



Courtesy Photo/Paul Chopra

Paul Chopra has over 25 years of experience in corporate and school-related finance. As the current Lafayette Parents in Education treasurer, he oversees their four to five million dollar annual budget, and is also a long-time school volunteer.

"I'm an accountant by profession, so my goal is to add that financial acumen and financial expertise to our existing board because I think that would be another layer of expertise that the collective board can really benefit from," Chopra said.

Chopra has two children in the district and became involved due to his

fondness for the schools in the Lafayette area. Chopra strives to use his fiscal experience to ensure the district uses all its resources to support its students.

"At the end of the day my goal is to make sure that each and every student in our district is represented appropriately. I don't want to leave any student behind. I want to make sure that regardless of any factor like race, gender, sexual orientation, or color, it doesn't matter, I want to make sure that we as a board serve for the good of each and every student," Chopra said.

Sibyl Minighini



Courtesy Photo/Sibyl Minighini

Sibyl Minighini is a school psychologist who works to provide a safe learning environment for high school students. If elected, Minighini plans to respond to community concerns regarding the safety and mental wellbeing of district students and staff.

"I have spent years working as a school psychologist, mentoring students, and advocating for educational improvements. My experience includes working and listening to students about their challenges, whether it's academic pressure or extracurricular needs. I'm passionate about creating supportive environments where every student can thrive," Minighini said.

Minighini will push for better resources, stronger safety measures, and increased student support. She also plans to work to ensure that all students in the district are served effectively and that mental health programs are well-funded and well-managed.

"I want to focus on smaller class sizes, increased support for mental health services, and more investment in [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] and arts programs. Additionally, I believe it's crucial to ensure student safety and protect spaces that promote inclusivity. I'm committed to making sure our schools are places where every student feels respected and valued," Minighini said.

Wendy Reicher



Courtesy Photo/Wendy Reicher

Wendy Reicher is a current AUHSD board member and college and career advisor. As a board member, Reicher has worked to enhance school culture and climate, close the opportunity and achievement gap, expand curricular development and high-quality programs, and strategic fiscal preparedness and planning.

"I've spent a significant amount of time working with our district students and love the ability to support them in my role as a Governing Board member," Reicher said.

Reicher looks to further support incoming staff and students as well as maintain the current standard of curriculum in the district.

"My priorities are to focus on hiring and retaining great staff both certificated and classified. I want to support our staff and give them the best possible chance to succeed," Reicher said.

"I would also like to continue the work we are doing to make our schools as a whole as inclusive as possible where all students, staff, and parents feel a sense of belonging and equity."

Stacey Schweppe



Courtesy Photo/Stacey Schweppe

Stacey Schweppe is an active volunteer who aims to empower students, teachers, and the broader community during her term. Schweppe brings extensive experience with the AUHSD schools, having served for two years as the President of the Parent Teacher Student Association and President of the Parent Teacher Organization. Schweppe was also a member of the Parent Teacher Association executive board for 14 years.

"I sit on the Citizens Oversight Committee for Parcel Talks, so I have a deep understanding of our budget. I have a historical perspective of budgeting. I have a workforce career with Gap Inc. that makes me good at collaboration

and working in team environments," Schweppe said.

If elected, Schweppe strives to open the district to voices from the larger nearby community and students that are struggling with the achievement gap. She specifically would like to advocate for students in Walnut Creek.

"I'd really like to give Walnut Creek a voice on the AUHSD table ... I think it's really important that we have diversity of geography and that someone on the board understands what it's like to be from a big community. Over 65,000 people live in Walnut Creek compared to our other smaller communities, and Walnut Creek has the greatest diversity of student population," Schweppe said.



Spooky Season at Acalanes

Celebrating Halloween around the school

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh, Trevor Krick, Audrey Tugade, and
Noah Frankel | Staff Writers

Photos by Tselmeg Orgilmunkh, Trevor Krick, Audrey
Tugade and Noah Frankel | Staff Writers

Spread by Molly Jones | Print Photo Story Editor



Contributing Photo/ Jane Schrader

As Halloween approaches and the temperature drops, the Acalanes calendar fills with various festivities and events to bring the school together.

Leadership hosted Halloween-themed events throughout October to get into the spooky spirit and increase school bonding. On Halloween day on Oct. 31, Acalanes students and staff also showed their spirit by dressing up for Halloween in unique costumes.



Contributing Photo/ Jane Schrader

Grade Level Potlucks

To kick off the month, the sophomore class officers hosted a Halloween-themed potluck on Oct. 18 during lunch in the sophomore quad.

"We [hosted] events to bring the student body closer together while celebrating a holiday everyone loves. I [hoped] to have a successful event where everyone has fun and gets a little sweet treat and has a good time," Sophomore Class Secretary Kayla Schaffer said.

The junior and senior class officers also hosted potlucks for their grades on Oct. 30. The potlucks featured different treats, donated by different families and students within the classes.

"The best things about potlucks for all the grades is that it's not only something fun, but it's a time where classmates go to be together," Senior Class President Jane Schrader said.



Contributing Photo/ Jane Schrader

Frosh Movie Night

To celebrate the Halloween season, Acalanes New Crew organized a Frosh movie night on Oct. 18. They watched *Hotel Transylvania* while eating food and candy. The event served as a bonding between frosh and upperclassmen, who are a part of New Crew.

"I liked how you can talk to other people. Going to events and hanging out with your friends is always fun," frosh Kareena Puri said.

New Crew aims to create a positive atmosphere for the frosh, welcoming them to Acalanes. They hoped to introduce the new frosh students to Acalanes by giving them a memorable night.

"We wanted to create a relaxed space for the frosh to hangout and have a fun time. It's great to see them laughing and enjoying the snacks, I think it helps create a sense of community. I'm glad I got to participate and help in this event," New Crew member and sophomore Mason Lanphere said.



Trunk or Treat

The Acalanes Associate Student Board (ASB) hosted a Halloween Trunk or Treat event on Oct. 28 on the blacktop, inviting students to join the festive celebrations. The event featured a range of activities designed to entertain all attendees.

"[We had] a lot of activities, like trick or treating, decorating cars, cake walk, and a raffle. Super fun events for everyone [enjoyed]," ASB Vice President and senior Miles Blackhart said.

While students were greeted with





decorations and activities, they listened to music, ate food, and spent time with people from all over the school.

"I like how it helps bring people together and how the school gets together and meets new people," sophomore Brody Coultas said.

Pumpkin Carving

During Academy on Oct. 30, the Environmental Board hosted a pumpkin carving event in room 314. The event highlighted the importance of being environmentally aware and saving food waste. Students learned how to utilize the entirety of the pumpkin to reduce waste such as roasting the seeds.

"It's a blend of fun and they also cleaned out the pumpkins yesterday cause they are going to cook the seeds and deliver them to people as a way to show you can reuse and eat a lot of what we have," Activities Director Katherine Walton said.



The event had a lively and collaborative atmosphere. Students were able to work in groups with friends when carving their pumpkins with unique designs.

"I really enjoyed carving pumpkins with my friends. I learned that it is important to compost your pumpkin remains and not just throw them away normally," frosh Kelsey Gunderson said.

Halloween Costumes on Campus

For Halloween this year, students dressed up in an assortment of costumes. Certain groups on campus such as Leadership dressed up in themed group costumes with their board.

"If everyone gets into a dress up then it can be fun,



I know we have fun in the leadership class doing it, and it encourages us to be more outgoing and get into the whole idea of halloween," Junior Class President Oliver Stoneman said.

Halloween provides a chance for people to express themselves through their costumes. Having a day to pose as something else can be a break from a normal school day and make it more engaging.

"My favorite part of Halloween is seeing all the creative costumes of my students [because] costumes usually represent something about a person's personality ... [Halloween is a] day to pretend to be something different can be fun and exciting," Living Earth and Human Anatomy and Physiology teacher Thomas McNamara said.



Staff and Student Trivia

At lunch on Friday, Nov. 1, Acalanes ASB hosted Halloween-themed staff and student trivia, where teams of two students and one teacher competed against each other. The event gave teachers a chance to work side by side with students.

"It is a good way for teachers and students to connect and learn new things," junior Ryan Azghadi said.

The trivia event helped build the school community as students collaborated with peers they might not otherwise have.

"We're trying to build ... school spirit within our grades and a good way to do it is having monthly events that are themed around things that are going on ... [the event] facilitates more of these interactions that aren't just hanging out with your friends, but [hanging] out in a big group of people," Sophomore Class President Nikhil Hunn said.



News Briefs

Annual Fall Blood Drive

Maddyx Bride | Head Copy Editor

Acalanes hosted its annual fall blood drive on Wednesday, Oct. 30 with the American Red Cross. Student volunteers who were 16 or older donated blood and received a \$10 Amazon gift card.

The event ran all day with a total of over 40 students donating blood at different appointment times throughout the day, as a part of the Red Cross' month-long blood drive campaign for October. All blood types were open to donate, although only students with type A negative, B negative, and O, who also met special eligibility requirements, could do a 'Power Red' donation which only takes the red blood cells.

The blood drive will return again in the spring where students will have another chance to help the cause and contribute to alleviating the national blood shortage.

Staff of the Month

Avery Robb | Print Editor-in-Chief

At the beginning of each month, students nominate a staff member for the new Staff of the Month award. This new program was designed to recognize and celebrate the contributions of Acalanes staff to the school and broader community.

On Sept. 1, English teacher Erin Barth was awarded Staff of the Month due to her dedication and hard work in the English department.

"It was really cool to be nominated because I didn't know about it until I was chosen. It's awesome that the students can vote and show their appreciation for all different staff across campus," Barth said.

Throughout October the Cafeteria staff were recognized as Staff of the Month for their devotion to the student body.

"It's a very nice feeling because we feel appreciated. We work hard to please all of the kids and make healthy and nutritious food for everyone," Cafeteria Manager Lili Samaras said.

DEIB Debriefs

Zinnia Khan | DEIB Director

Hello and welcome to issue three of DEIB Debriefs! My name is Zinnia Khan, and I am a senior at Acalanes with a passion for exploring Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) on campus. This issue, I took a look at student resources during Transgender Visibility Week, and talked to social studies teacher Brian Smith about the significance of National Native American Heritage Month.

Transgender Visibility Week

This year, Transgender Visibility Week falls on Nov. 13-19, a time dedicated to supporting and celebrating transgender identities across the world. On Nov. 28, 1998, an unknown person murdered Rita Hester in her Boston apartment because of her transgender identity. Her death led Gwendolyn Ann Smith to create the first International Transgender Day of Remembrance. LGBTQ+ activists across the nation have since expanded that federally recognized holiday into a full week of remembrance.

On the Acalanes campus, students have a variety of resources available to them if they are in crisis or just looking to have a conversation about their gender identity. One option is to attend Acalanes' Queer Student Alliance (QSA) meetings at lunch on Mondays in room 303.

"During Transgender Visibility Week QSA [offers] Acalanes students a space to celebrate their queerness as well as education regarding transgender people. If anyone needs help regarding transitions or resources, we are willing to do proper research, and talk to staff on your behalf or just point you in the right direction," senior Stella Burne said.

Additionally, Acalanes provides transgender students with resources for support and education.

"Acalanes also offers Gender Support Plans to students. They help create an understanding among staff, parents and a student on how to respect the student's gender identity, which will be reinforced by administration," Burne said.

Students can always visit the wellness center for more resources regarding gender identity or general support.

"Wellness is always open for students before, during, or after school and is such a great place to go if you need anything. The counselors are also such a great place to go and they can also help with things like the student support plans which help with multiple things including name or pronoun changes," junior Max Martinez said.

National Native American Heritage Month

Every year, by statute or presidential proclamation, the federal government recognizes November as National Native American Heritage Month. This began in 1990, when President George H. W. Bush approved a joint resolution designating November 1990 as "National American Indian Heritage Month." Similar proclamations, under variations on the name, such as "Native American Heritage Month" and "National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month," have been issued each year since 1994.

The purpose of National Native American Heritage Month is to recognize the history, culture, and contributions of Indigenous people, a goal that mirrors sections of the curriculum of American History courses at Acalanes.

Some history teachers aim to foster open mindsets among their students in regards to challenging issues surrounding the history of Native American interactions with white settlers.

"It's the whole idea of it's not your fault but it is your problem, to acknowledge that yes that may have been just the way it was, but let's not discount what's happening today, based on what was happening then," Smith said.

**Blueprint would like to acknowledge that Smiths' daughter, Sof Cerruti, is a member of Blueprint staff.*

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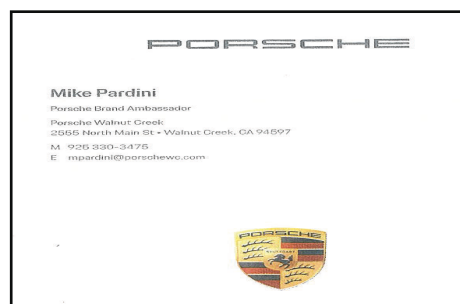
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FEATURE



Heading to the Polls

Local and school preparations help first-time voters prepare for elections

Jack Gebhardt, Cedric He, and Cameron Thornton | Head Copy Editor, Online Head of Layout, and Print Sports Editor

Graphic by Bo Chevaleau

As Americans across the country cast their vote, Contra Costa County community members and Acalanes students alike consider their voting choices in both the real and school-simulated elections.

Acalanes students who are eligible to vote in the 2024 Presidential Election on Nov. 5 have a breadth of feelings about voting for the first time. Acalanes prepared for the election by conducting an on-campus election simulation and hosting presentations from local voter organizations. In the broader community, the Contra Costa County Elections Office is preparing for the election and anticipates a large number of mail-in ballots, along with those cast at in-person polls on Nov. 5.

Acalanes students across grade levels recently participated in an election simulation on campus from Oct. 31 to Nov. 5. Students who voted registered through the school website prior to the mock election.

Librarian Barbara Burkhalter and English teacher Erik Honda first started the simulation in 2018 after the two noticed a gap in student knowledge about the voting process.

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"Many people, students as well, were taken by surprise by the results of the election in November of 2016. Not long after that, Mr. Honda read an article about the low percentage of youth voters, 18 to 29, that turned out for the 2016 election. We talked about how students going into their first election might need help finding worthwhile election information, synthesizing it and then acting upon it by voting," Burkhalter said.

While most students are unable to vote during their time in high school, the simulation offers hands-on experience with the voting process and allows students to gain experience in researching specific policy issues and each candidate's position.

"The simulation [made] me more aware of the voting process and my ability to have an influence. I found particular value in the simulation in learning more about local elections and the process of voting in terms of state propositions or district representatives," senior Kaya Hoeberechts said.

Historically, the school's mock election has not directly followed the timeline of the real election. This year, however, students regis-

ter to vote before the election and are able to cast their ballots before Election Day, just as voters do in the real election.

"Given that being an informed citizen is written into the mission statements of both our school and the district, we thought we'd do more than a one day mock election. We'd do an entire election simulation in step with a real election," Burkhalter said.

While many community members expect a greater student voter turnout than normal because of the alignment to the real election, some believe that students may experience more political discomfort.

"I think students are very politically aware and have issues that they care about. At the same time, it seems that there is more hesitancy to discuss this election and issues because of the greater divisiveness across the country. But there are ways to discuss issues and even to disagree about them, while keeping the discussion civil," Burkhalter said.

Many students became aware of the simulation through their English and history teachers, many of which facilitated in-class discussions about civic engagement and brought students to the library to cast their vote. Students who received in-class instruction found that they were better equipped to cast their vote in the simulation.

"From being in Mr. Honda's English class at the time I was well educated in today's politics and I feel that that knowledge served me well when casting my ballot for the simulation," junior Dashiell Tinianow said.

Before casting their ballot, voters must register to vote either in-person, mail-in, drop box, or online. In California, voters must have registered electronically on official government websites such as vote.gov or registertovote.ca.gov before the deadline for their chosen voting method. However for those who missed the registration deadline, California allows voters to register on Election Day and cast their ballot before the polls close.

In Contra Costa County, fewer people chose to return to in-person polls, instead mailing in their ballots from their home. Although the COVID-19 pandemic made it increasingly difficult for voters to visit the polls in person and increased at-home voter turnout, many mailed in their ballots prior to the pandemic.

"Turnout for in-person voting has been on the decline for the last ten years in Contra Costa County, and I don't think that's going to be much changed. We're expecting to see anywhere from 30 to 40 thousand voters at the polls on Election Day which is right

around what we expect and what we had in the last Presidential General Election. It was a little bit different back in 2020 because we were still dealing with [COVID-19, but even before that], around 90 percent of our voters were already voting by mail," Contra Costa County Election Services Manager for Election Day Operations Jose Gonzalez said.

Despite the growing popularity of mail-in voting, some community members still choose to visit the polls on Election Day, keeping the tradition of in-person voting alive.

"I think [in-person voting] is more of a nostalgic thing nowadays. People usually treat Election Day as [a way] to see neighbors that they haven't seen in a couple months, or just maybe as a social event, to go to the polls and see neighborhood friends and family members that normally would vote at the polls. I mean it's the same thing, whether you vote in person or by mail, ballots are treated with security and are all scanned here at our office the same way," Gonzalez said.

Local election offices are responsible for handling multiple elections per year, such as the primary and Presidential election. Large and serious elections like these take mass preparation well before Election Day.

"We prepare well ahead of the election. We think about what we want to do, what we want to improve, and what our goals are. Leading up to the election, our big tasks are ... designing and laying out the ballot and testing the voting equipment. For us, almost 90 to 95 percent of our ballots will come back via the mail or by a drop box, so that's where almost all of our preparation goes," Contra Costa County Election Services Manager for the Voting Systems Team Travis Ebbert said.

The Contra Costa County elections office utilizes safety measures such as signature matching, where they match the signature on the ballot to the signature on someone's voter registration to ensure there is no voter fraud.

"I think for the most part all of our voters feel that their vote is secure and that their ballot is being handled properly throughout the entire process. We have over 700 thousand voters and we don't hear many that complain or have many questions about it," Gonzalez said. "For those who maybe have doubts or have questions, I would invite them to come see the process. [Voters can observe] how that ballot is handled until they make it back to our office and then go through the tallying process here at our office."

Community members not only participate in the election process by voting, but many volunteer their time to help the voting process run smoothly on Election Day.

"[Volunteers] consist of everything from high school students to senior citizens, retired people. It's just a hodge podge of people that volunteer and receive a stipend to work the polls on Election Day," Gonzalez said.

Other local and national organizations focus on voter turnout efforts and encouragement. The League of Women Voters of Diablo Valley (LWVDV) recently visited Acalanes for a presentation on misinformation and disinformation during the election season on Oct. 14 and 15. Many history and government classes attended the presentation in the library, with students answering proposed questions and showcasing their political knowledge or awareness.

"The idea [of the presentation] was to help students understand how to recognize misinformation and disinformation, how it could look, what they should think about when looking at sources, and making sure that they're looking at information that has good links, information about where it was sourced, and whether it has been verified. I was really impressed ... with the students that I had the opportunity to meet, and also their teachers, because I've got to believe that their teachers had a lot to do with the fact that they were pretty darn well-informed," LWVDV Co-Chair of Voter Services Ana Pan said.

Many young voters are now considering their roles as informed voters as they prepare to cast their ballots for the first time. Some feel they received adequate information from school, while others seek education beyond the classroom to learn about the election process.

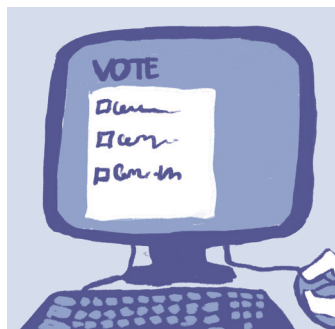
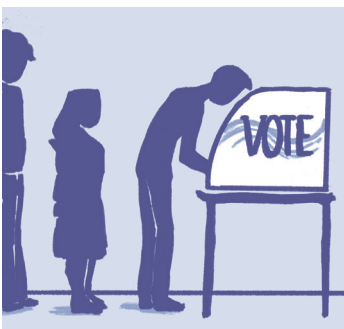
"I think I feel somewhat informed, just by the news, school, my parents, and social media. We do a bit of research in class, and it is pretty unbiased, so I feel like I am getting valid information. But I also feel like I would research a bit more especially if I wasn't so busy with school and extracurriculars," senior Dulci Vail said.

However, as some look for voter education resources, social media and Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes a concern for voters and voter outreach organizations looking to encourage factual research.

"Everybody goes to social media for information and some of the things that are shared on social media may just be someone's opinions. It may be third-hand, fourth-hand, who knows how many hands that information has passed through? Social media ... and now with [AI that] can be really manipulated in kind of evil ways, plays a huge role in where people get their information. So students need to really get smart about it in terms of making sure that information is coming from reliable sources," Pan said.

As Acalanes' first-time voters prepare for Nov. 5, many feel excited to exercise their right to vote for the first time, emphasizing the importance of informed voting.

"I definitely think there are different opinions on the electoral process and majority vote. It feels exciting to have the independence to make my own decision and finally decide who I want to vote for and become involved in American politics," senior Katelyn Forschler said. "At the end of the day, the fact that we're able to vote at 18 and everyone in the country has that same right is really special. We shouldn't take for granted that we get to have a say."



Meet The Future Leaders of Lafayette

Learn about the new Lafayette City Council candidates

Tselmeg Orgilmunkh, Audrey Tugade, and Sydney Scovic | Staff Writers

The future of Lafayette may soon change as candidates for Lafayette City Council race to get votes for four-year and two-year terms. Leading up to Lafayette's local elections on Nov. 5, diverse candidates presented distinct visions for the City Council on key issues. The Lafayette City Council has five members and meets on the second and fourth Monday of every month in the Don Tatzin Community Hall at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Many view a council member's personal values as important to establishing how effective their leadership and decision-making will be. Many also agree that a council member's ability to understand and prioritize the community's needs is crucial to their success in their role.

"The most important values for a City Council [member] to have are an accurate understanding of their constituents' wants and needs, strong decision-making, [and] a willingness to collaborate with those who both share and differ in opinion and experience in politics," Current Events and Issues Co-President Miles Blackheart said.

Members of the Acalanes community believe a candidate with strong collaboration skills is critical. The Council has historically worked with Acalanes to help support the high school community, and many hope to continue this effort.

"An important value for a City Council member is] to work to support all members of the community. To work as part of a team, the City Council. To collaborate with city staff ... The City of Lafayette has historically been a great partner with Acalanes High School and the district. We hope that will continue," Superintendent Dr. John Nickerson said.

Carl Anduri



Courtesy Photo/Carl Anduri

Carl Anduri, a former member of the Lafayette City Council, campaigns again for a seat on the council. He began serving the Lafayette community in 1997 as a member of the Lafayette Planning Commission. He first entered the City Council race in 2002, earning re-election twice since then, displaying his commitment to the community and its development.

"The motivation has just been to make Lafayette an even better place to live," An-

duri said.

The school districts in Lafayette play a vital role in the community, meaning they are significant priorities for potential City Council members to address. Anduri highlighted student safety as an important focus during his campaign.

"One of the ways that we have [cooperated] is on school safety. You've seen the improvements that are around Acalanes, [including new] crosswalks. We've gotten input from the school districts and what they would like to see, so we cooperate there. We cooperate with respect to providing crossing guards at the schools, so wherever we can find an area to cooperate we do," Anduri said.

Anduri also recognizes that embracing diversity in race and sexual orientation is essential to fostering a successful and inclusive community.

"In Lafayette, I know there are people, because of their ethnicity, their race, their sexual orientation, may not feel as welcome as others and that's a problem. We really want everyone to feel they are an equal part of the community and to feel completely welcome and supported by the community ... It is something that we need to be concerned with because peo-

ple only reach their full potential if they feel supported and part of the community," Anduri said.

Additionally, Lafayette is a high fire severity zone which makes it particularly vulnerable to wildfires. Given the rise of wildfires throughout California, Anduri emphasizes that implementing effective safety measures to protect the community must be a top priority.

"I think we need to also think a little bit bigger in terms of working with the state and the county to get more protection through immediate detection of fire ignition and immediate suppression of fire and there are some satellite technologies that may be coming online in the next few years," Anduri said.

As a previous member of the Council, despite a break from the council, he is proud of what they have accomplished and believes that Lafayette is positively progressing.

"I think that the City Council [has] done a fairly good job of helping to meet the needs of the residents. You know I think we're on the right track, we can always do things better, we can always do more to meet the needs and challenges that we are facing," Anduri said.

Gina Dawson



Contributing Photo/Gina Dawson

Gina Dawson, the incumbent Mayor of Lafayette from 2020 to 2024, sought re-election to Council as well. Dawson has been a Lafayette resident for 16 years, with an active role in the community as a Lafayette resident and on the City Council.

"I moved to Lafayette with my husband and children, a preschooler and kindergartener [at the time], in 2008 and have been volunteering within the community ever since," Dawson said.

Before her mayorship, Dawson worked in marketing and sales for 16 years. In 2017, she founded Save Lafayette Trees with her

husband in response to a PG&E program that threatened prominent Lafayette trees. She also worked on the founding board of the non-profit Lafayette Hillside Memorial, which works to preserve the legacy of the Lafayette crosses located on Deer Hill Road.

As a Lafayette parent, Dawson has been involved in the local school districts and as a contributor to the Lafayette Partners in Education.

"After we moved here, I helped out in the classrooms at [Burton Valley Elementary School] then edited the PTA newsletter. I then helped with the transition of Lafayette Arts & Science Foundation becoming Lafayette Partners in Education - I unified the communications to all the elementary schools, Stanley, and Acalanes," Dawson said.

Dawson chose to run for City Council again to continue making a difference in the City and to improve issues important to her including affordable housing and implementing a sales tax.

"There is still more work to be done, particularly fiscal sustainability and implementation of the Housing Element, along with other important planning for the City's future. I hope residents will vote Yes on Measure H as if passed, the sales tax revenue will help us, and our staff, continue to serve the City at the level residents currently expect and deserve," Dawson said.

Additionally, she is passionate about the issue of affordable housing and is dedicated to addressing its place in the community.

"Lafayette is a wonderful place to live for so many reasons, but the median home price at \$1.8 million makes it inaccessible to many people who might want to live here. I would say the lack of a range of affordable housing options in Lafayette is a social issue - one of equity and inclusivity," Dawson said.

Through her work in the community, council, and career in finance, Dawson believes that she is qualified to improve Lafayette.

"I have experience as a council member in a city like Lafayette and know what good local government looks like. I've also had a successful career in finance and understand budgets and what makes fiscal sense. Lafayette needs new and diverse perspectives and experiences in order to face today's challenges," Dawson said.

Dawson hopes to maintain attributes of Lafayette that appeal to families like her own, while also implementing change and growth to move the City towards the future.

"My goal is to preserve our community values as we grow, as change and growth are inevitable, and I envision smart, safe, sustainable growth that welcomes all," Dawson said.

Lauren Herpich



Courtesy Photo/Lauren Herpich

Lauren Herpich, City Council Candidate, ran for a four-year term. Herpich, a longtime Lafayette resident, has been involved in the community through several organi-

zations and has contributed to Lafayette through her community service.

"I served on the Parks, Trails and Recreation Commission from 2017 to 2021 where I was an integral part of the redevelopment of Brook Street Park. I am proud of the fact that families are able to enjoy updated amenities because of my involvement," Herpich said. "I also am a previous member of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce through my small business and a former board member of the Lafayette Historical Society."

As a resident of downtown Lafayette, Herpich brings her unique perspective and experiences which she believes will vitally add to the Council by representing other local families and residents.

"I am running for City Council because no one else running [for City Council] lives in or around downtown Lafayette. I do. This is where the bulk of our housing and transportation initiatives are being focused. I also believe that young families should be represented too," Herpich said.

Herpich wants to follow Lafayette's overall mission to adhere to its ideals of being a family-oriented, welcoming town within a beautiful setting. This foundation is the hallmark of her goals as a Council member.

"[One of my main goals is] to adhere to the mission statement of the city; for Lafayette to continue to be, in part, a welcoming, inclusive, safe, family-friendly city. One that respects its magnificent natural setting ... and that is a highly desirable small-town community with a semi-rural ambiance," Herpich said.

Herpich is also focused on meeting the needs of the community without stretching budgets. To do this, she advocates for effective and transparent communications within the community.

"In addition to the priority of balancing our city's budget, I am running for Council to create more neighborhood community spaces, balance our town's growth and governance with the reality of our limited resources and infrastructure, and guide more effective communications that better

inform citizens," Herpich said.

She believes that creating a solid plan to avoid similar spending overreach of the past will create opportunities for development and larger budget line items for initiatives that will improve the community's overall experience.

"Since we are a limited resources city, we need to have better prioritization and

focus on how taxpayer dollars are spent. Past City Councils have spent too much on property investment without development and smaller budget line items that remove the opportunity to invest in projects that can make an actual difference for our citizens," Herpich said.

Herpich wants to preserve the characteristics of Lafayette, such as its nature and

family-friendly areas.

"I believe that our city is at a crossroads and must prepare for the future while still maintaining the character of our community. I care deeply for this aspirational community and want it to be the best it can be not only for my family but also for everyone who calls Lafayette home," Herpich said.

John McCormick



Courtesy Photo/John McCormick

John McCormick is a returning candidate running for a four-year term on City Council. McCormick and his wife founded Lamorinda Music 15 years ago. He reports that they have almost 40 people employed between staff and instructors and are committed to the community.

"I'm on [the] City Council now, I know what it takes, it's not a mystery. And I love

doing it. I just enjoy all the different aspects of it. And I think that what I bring to the table, as far as being a business owner, there aren't any other business owners or small business owners on the council. It's a good perspective," McCormick said.

As a small business owner, one of McCormick's main priorities for the town is advocating for fellow small businesses in Lafayette.

"I think championing and representing businesses everywhere and making sure that our small businesses and the whole business community thrive in the whole downtown area is important. Making sure that's not too impacted by all the housing and discussing how we make that a win, win for everybody," McCormick said.

McCormick is also focused on Lafayette's sustainability. He is currently on the board of Recycle Smart, Lafayette's recycling provider.

"Recycle smart does a great job, encouraging recycling, you know, composting and so on. But there's better, more things we can do around education, definitely, for all the residents, we can always do better. I'm pushing Recycle Smart to allow us to

recycle more and more things. But businesses in particular, it's not good, right? We can do a lot better with our business recycling" McCormick said.

McCormick recognizes that he is committed to making everyone feel welcome and accepted in Lafayette and protecting citizens' first amendment rights.

"I think the overall philosophy of diversity, inclusion and making everybody feel welcome is so important ... I think by our general actions, we can show that Lafayette is a great place to live, work and play. If we think about improving socially, and looking at our marginalized communities, how we make them more part of the community, having more housing people can live in" McCormick said.

Additionally, McCormick has two kids, both of whom are Acalanes alumni. McCormick and his wife have spent a lot of time in Acalanes Performing Arts Center (PAC) and were also founding members of Acalanes Performing Arts Parents (APAP).

"It's great to see what's going on and, we spent a lot, of time in Acalanes. And I mean, we could say it's the best high school, I think that's probably pretty clear" McCormick said.

Jim Cervantes



Courtesy Photo/Jim Cervantes

Jim Cervantes is one of the two candidates running for a two-year term on

City Council. Cervantes and his family have lived in Lafayette for twelve years and in the Lamorinda area for about thirty years. Cervantes is an avid participant in Lafayette Rotary and St. Perpetua Church. After his retirement, Cervantes joined the Lafayette General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) and began working on the City's housing and safety plans.

"I care deeply about Lafayette...it's a special place. We are at a crossroads on several key issues, particularly the City's long-term financial sustainability and fire safety. I believe I can help address these issues through my career experience in Public Finance, my work as Vice-Chair and Chair of Lafayette's General Plan Advisory Committee and my involvement with the Firewise program," Cervantes said.

After graduating, Cervantes pursued internships with numerous local government

and non-profit organizations. After working on a non-profit housing development corporation in the San Francisco Mission District, Cervantes engaged in a 34-year career in public finance. He developed nearly 500 bond financing programs for California cities and public agencies.

"In addition to my work on Lafayette's General Plan Advisory Committee, I also served on the County Board that recommended the funding of over \$100 million per year in programs through a recent County sales tax measure. Two years ago, I was also appointed by the Governor as Board Chair of the California Housing Finance Agency, which finances affordable housing throughout California," Cervantes said.

Cervantes' background in local government and finance correlates with his goals for the community, as well as where he

would like to focus his effort if elected.

"I plan to focus on ensuring the City's long-term financial sustainability, systematically addressing wildfire preparedness in collaboration with the Contra Costa Fire Protection District, and continuing the work on traffic safety improvements," Cervantes said.

Cervantes also recounts how he is equipped to work with the people of Lafayette due to his experience with many City Councils and public agency boards. He notes that he will work to be transparent with residents.

"If elected, I would like to work to bet-

ter communicate to the community the elements of our City budget so individuals have a better understanding of how their taxes are spent and are better able to participate in that process," Cervantes said.

As for his work with Lafayette's school system, Cervantes wants to continue the City Council's partnership with Acalanes Union High School District.

"I respect the work of both school districts and would look to [keep] up a dialogue on ways the City can collaborate for the benefit of the community. The City funds a portion of the cost for the crossing guard program. Our funding may be

limited for other support, but I would value the discussion," Cervantes said.

Ultimately, Cervantes wants all demographics and citizens in Lafayette to feel acknowledged and protected.

"We need to be sure that all people in our community feel welcomed, safe, and appreciated. This applies particularly to community members in historically marginalized groups, which may include people of color, the LGBTQ community, individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, and other groups. We need to live up to our aspiration to be a welcoming and caring city," Cervantes said.

Mario DiPrisco



Courtesy Photo/Mario DiPrisco

Mario DiPrisco is one of the two candidates competing for a two-year term. He moved here in 2008 and has three children, two of whom are current Acalanes students. As a father and member of the community, he has coached his children's sports teams and been involved with the Arts. DiPrisco's background in local government includes an election in 2000 to

serve a two-year term on his hometown's City Council in Albany, California.

"I was born in Albany and, in some ways, it shares a lot of characteristics with Lafayette: good schools, active community, and a little city trying to preserve what makes it special while dealing with growth," DiPrisco said.

DiPrisco decided to run for Lafayette City Council, with the goal to improve financial policy. As a Lafayette resident, DiPrisco notes that he can empathize with the community along with decisions that directly affect citizens.

"I thought Council should have done more to address the loss of homeowners insurance, should have spent the federal funds from Covid relief more wisely, and should be working to reduce traffic on Moraga Road instead of increasing it with a large housing project on 949 Moraga Road," DiPrisco said.

Additionally, one of DiPrisco's main goals for the community is to get Lafayette's fiscal house in order to be sustainable in the long run.

"Even if Measure H passes, it is only for seven years so we need to develop plans to grow revenue or cut expenses sustain-

ably. We cannot keep relying on windfalls to cover current expenses," DiPrisco said.

As an Acalanes parent, DiPrisco accounts for his plans for the school district. DiPrisco remarks on how he can uphold and serve the community through the City and school board's forum.

"I think we should do more there: are there opportunities to reduce traffic with busing? Are there opportunities to invest in fields and provide better athletic facilities for the community? These are the questions I'll ask when elected," DiPrisco said.

The Democratic Party of Contra Costa County and the California State High School Democrats, as well as former Mayor Cam Burks and current council member Susan Candell, have endorsed DiPrisco.

"I have experience as a council member in a city like Lafayette and know what good local government looks like. I've also had a successful career in finance and understand budgets and what makes fiscal sense. Lafayette needs new and diverse perspectives and experiences in order to face today's challenges. I'm the best choice for that voice," DiPrisco said.



Gallacher's Gist: Politics Behind Pills

Examining the political influences on the drug epidemic

Grace Gallacher | Opinion Copy Editor
Spread by Bo Chevaleau

With a growing concern of spiked Halloween candy and a greater emphasis on the dangers of substance abuse, many reflect on how the drug epidemic became so dire.

According to the *National Institute of Drug Abuse* (NIDA), as of 2022, the United States has over 100,000 deaths due to overdoses annually, with an upward trend. Of those 100,000 deaths, an estimated 70,000 of them were the result of synthetic drugs such as fentanyl. According to the NIDA, trouble at home, work, school, or with friends can increase one's susceptibility to drug addiction, along with mental health issues, peer pressure, and genetics. Additionally, recent research published in the *Annual Review of Public Health* provides new insight into the problem and explains how doctors over-prescribing painkillers can account for the heroin and opioid epidemic.

The *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* recommends that doctors not prescribe opioids to minors because of their higher susceptibility to addiction. Per a 2019 *National Library of Medicine* (NIH) study of Americans 12 to 21 years old, 6.3 percent had been prescribed opioids at least once. Of those prescriptions, 45.6 percent were high-risk and dentists or surgeons wrote 61.4 percent of them. Due to these risky prescriptions, many teenagers develop addictions that can last the rest of their lives.

Such prescription errors are only heightened by the adoption of electronic prescriptions, often referred to as e-prescriptions. With the new system, patients can receive a prescription much more efficiently. However, according to a NIH

study, e-prescriptions pose increased risks of error at an estimated five percent. The most common e-prescribing errors include incorrect drug quantity, dosing directions, duration of therapy, and dosage formulation. Without the requirement of in-person meetings, it can be easier for those with addiction problems to acquire illegal pills, as well as receive an unnecessary prescription that can do more harm than good.

Even with unnecessary prescriptions, however, patients cannot continue to get pills by constantly refilling a prescription. This can lead patients and others to turn to 3rd party dealers for supply. Yet, due to the high costs of producing opioids, illegal drug dealers have turned to synthetic opiates like fentanyl, which is more than 100 times stronger than morphine, an incredibly strong narcotic commonly administered in hospitals for patients with extreme pain.

Due to its extreme strength, fentanyl is incredibly dangerous. According to *USA Facts*, fentanyl-related overdoses are only rising. In 2019, fentanyl was involved in over 50 percent of all drug overdose deaths, whereas in 2022, it was the underlying cause of nearly 70 percent. Such information matches a study by the *Drug Enforcement Administration* (DEA), which found about 60 percent of fentanyl-laced fake prescription pills contain a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl, thereby making street drugs more deadly than not.

Further, according to the DEA, medical professionals consider two milligrams of fentanyl a lethal dose. As a result of its low cost and high potency, illegal drug cartels splice fentanyl into drugs they sell to increase its supposed effects, ergo attracting more customers and enhancing profits. These drugs commonly include heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine, which are often taken in higher doses than

just two milligrams, leading to thousands of accidental deaths. Also,

per DEA studies, an average counterfeit pill ranges from .02 to 5.1 milligrams of fentanyl per tablet due to the cartel's lack of regulation and rapid manufacturing to enhance profits. The same studies found that 42 percent of the pills tested contained at least two milligrams of fentanyl.

Since the illegal drug cartels commonly produce their supply in Latin American countries, many Americans have developed fears and prejudices against people of Latinx descent. Somewhat led by political leaders, these fears have led to stereotypes that harm people of color inside and outside of the United States.

According to NIH, although Black citizens in America are convicted less than their White counterparts in drug-related crimes, they had significantly more sentences resulting in incarceration, along with longer-lasting sentences. They determined that this is likely because Black citizens were more frequently charged with direct crimes, such as drug sales or possession, while White citizens faced more charges indirectly related to drugs, such as committing a crime intoxicated with illegal substances or committing a crime to possess illegal substances.

Fentanyl's dangers are so prominent that California recently enacted new, stricter punishments for its possession or sale. As of the beginning of 2024, if someone is convicted of a fentanyl-related crime, they could face a minimum of \$1000 in fines and prison time. Prison time also automatically increases if one is found selling or distributing the drug, and the severity of punishment depends on substance weight. For instance, selling or distributing more than one kilogram of fentanyl adds three years to someone's prison sentence, while weights exceeding 80 kilograms add 25 years.

However, the state is quite divided over the bill's complexities. Some feel that the greater threat of a prison sentence and fines will decrease the likelihood of residents seeking help, either for themselves or their peers. Further, the *California Pub-*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BRIEFS

Sameed Marco and Saaj Shah | Online Content Manager and Online Editor

Governing Board

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Governing Board held a meeting on Oct. 16, inviting student representatives from all five schools to provide updates on recent site events and activities, followed by Governing Board members who spoke about recent district updates and changes. The public can access the meeting by attending in person or through a live broadcast on the AUHSD website.

The AUHSD Governing Board addressed chronic absenteeism among students, which they defined as missing ten percent or more of the school day. They examined programs targeted at raising student attendance and provided information on the district's absenteeism statistics.

Part of their annual Title IX report, in order to guarantee equitable financing, access, and participation for both boys' and girls' sports programs, the board also examined the district's Title IX athletic equity policies. They adjusted pertinent administrative guidelines and rules to conform to the most recent Title IX regulations.

In addition, the board announced the creation of an AUHSD Artificial Intelligence (AI) Workgroup and looked at the possibilities of generative AI in education. The committee will develop the district's AI integration concepts and guidelines. Lastly, the board discussed the latest developments on the roofing improvements that are still underway at Miramonte and Las Lomas High Schools.

City Council

The Lafayette City Council held one of its bimonthly meetings on Oct. 15. The public can access the meeting's minutes, agenda, and audio on the City of Lafayette website, and the Council posts a livestream of the meeting on the City of Lafayette's Youtube channel. Community members can also virtually join the meeting on Zoom through the city website. For the meeting, the council opened with a closed session followed by public comments.

Afterward, City Manager Niroop Srivatsa gave an update on all city departments and projects, stating that all departments were running well. Fire Chief Chris Bachman then gave an update on fire safety in Lafayette including what contributes to wildfire threats, new helicopter applications in fire rescue, prevention and firefighting, and ongoing projects such as dead tree removal and evacuation route clean-ups in Lafayette.

lic Defenders Association claims the new law is ineffective because people who use or sell fentanyl are already aware that their actions are illegal, so increasing the punishment's severity will not alter their actions.

Additionally, while inmates cannot possess drugs, prisoners do not have to take rehabilitation courses unless a court order requires them to. This can mean that they do not have the support they need upon release to maintain their sobriety. According to *Alpine Recovery Lodge*, recently released prisoners' limited access to support networks and the stress of incarceration can increase their risk of relapse or exacerbate addiction-related issues.

For that reason, experts argue that education is the best way to prevent and stop

addiction. In July, Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law that by 2026, all public, charter, and private schools with any form of health classes must teach about the dangers and risks of fentanyl; the course will also be a graduation requirement.

While the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) already requires students to pass a Health and Sexual Development course, they teach about the risks of fentanyl and other drugs. AUHSD also provides students with extra resources and education with mandatory presentations such as Song For Charlie, an event to educate students about the dangers of drugs and random pills and how they can impact anyone.

Schools of all levels participate in drug

awareness with programs such as Red Ribbon Week, an annual awareness campaign in the United States that aims to prevent violence, drugs, tobacco, smoking, and alcohol. The week lasts from October 23 to 31, and the organization and schools utilize red ribbons, a symbol of drug abuse awareness and prevention, to showcase their support for the cause. The Lafayette Elementary School District used to participate in the week, introducing younger students to the organization. To continue their education at a higher level, other Lafayette schools and districts could participate as well in the future, to inform older students with increased access to illegal drugs about their potential dangers.



BEHIND CLOSED CAMPUS DOORS

Examining the causes and implications of the closed-campus policy

Aamena Shipchandler, Molly Connelly, and Neve Murphy | Print News Editor, Print Feature Editor,
and Print Opinion Editor

Graphics and Photos by Justin Rosenblatt

Spread by Molly Connelly and Emily Roberts

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, multiple sources chose to remain anonymous. They are quoted as Anonymous junior 1, Anonymous junior 2, Anonymous senior, survey respondent 1, survey respondent 2 and survey respondent 3.

At 12:50 p.m. on a typical Friday, the bell rings signaling the start of lunch. Students pack up their bags, leave their fifth-period classrooms, and head to lunch. The freshman and sophomore quads quickly fill up with students who are eager to connect with their friends and take a break from the day. However, the junior and senior quads remain silent and empty.

The Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) has been a closed-campus district since its establishment in 1940, however, administrators recently became aware that many students were not following the policy. *Blueprint* sought to investigate the extent to which the administration enforces the policy, and the effectiveness of consequences for student behavior, both this year and historically.

The AUHSD officially implemented a written closed-campus policy 30 years ago. In the 2024-2025 AUHSD student handbook, the policy details that students must remain on campus from the beginning of their first class to the end of their last class unless otherwise excused by a parent or guardian. This includes brunch, lunch, and academy periods.

California Education Code 44808.5 allows districts to have open campuses, stating that if a campus chooses to have an open campus, the school is not liable for students when they are not on the site. Nonetheless, the AUHSD's commitment to student safety is a driving factor to upholding the closed campus policy.

"[The policy] is primarily in place for the safety of students. The school and the district are responsible for students during the school day and ... there are safety concerns as if students are leaving, both just driving their cars around town but also if something bad happens or students make a mistake, the school feels a responsibility for that, so the school is charged with keeping them under their supervision," AUHSD superintendent Dr. Nickerson said.

This year, the Acalanes administration has taken specific concern to the closed campus policy, particularly with students leaving campus during lunch.

"This year, we became aware that many students were not following [the policy] ... After an investigation, we caught 30 kids returning from lunch one day," Principal Eric Shawn said.

The AUHSD implements the policy across all high school sites in the district, with the exception of the Acalanes Center for Independent Study. Each individual site is responsible for enforcing the policy.

When the AUHSD transitioned to a block schedule in 2017, the closed campus policy became harder to maintain, especially during lunch. The shift meant that certain students did not have classes after lunch and could leave when lunch began, while other students stayed at school until the end of seventh period. This shift made distinguishing between students leaving after all their classes versus students leaving for unauthorized reasons more challenging for campus supervisors.

"One of the main issues is that we have students with [different numbers of classes], so it's really hard to know who's coming [back on campus] when they are done with school and who is coming [back] when they aren't supposed to," Noon Supervisor Mike Ivankovich said.

Acalanes students with only five periods may leave campus during lunch every day of the week, however they may not return until the very end of the school day. The policy explains that students who return to campus despite not having a sixth period will face consequences.

"Recently I pulled into the lot one day with me and three of my friends and none of us had 6th periods. I was just bringing them back to their cars after lunch, and Eric Shawn was out there and he stopped me ... to give us detentions," senior Chris Truta said.

Many Acalanes students have noticed the lack of student compliance to the policy as they have either gone off campus themselves or seen other students violating the closed campus policy. In an anonymous *Blueprint* survey that 229 Acalanes students participated in, 34.4 percent of student respondents said they have gone off campus during lunch, break, or academy since the start of the 2024-2025 school year.

Students often leave campus to get food, return to their houses, or take a break from school. Others simply cross the street to purchase something from the gas station.

"Most of the time when I leave school, I go to get food with my friends. I like leaving campus because my friends and I find going to different restaurants fun. It's nice because I often forget to pack a lunch ... It's also nice to take a break from school sometimes because being at school can feel overwhelming," Anonymous junior 1 said.

Large numbers of students leaving campus may draw away from an active campus culture, where students are able to connect with various social spheres outside of class time.

"[When considering the block schedule], we were mostly concerned and worried about the student culture component, that students wouldn't connect as much on campus, or they wouldn't be engaged in lunchtime activities and things like that," former Acalanes Principal Travis Bell said.

To address student resistance to the policy, Acalanes has taken various measures including strict consequences for leaving school unexcused, such as receiving detention and a cut for missing the lunch period.

"So far, [giving detentions] seems to be working. Students are staying on campus more often, or they're taking the risk of losing their privileges. Mr. Takahashi and Ms. Walsh have made it clear to coaches that students could lose the opportunity to participate in sports if they leave campus without permission. Par-



ents have also been informed, and we've seen students starting to follow the rules more closely," Shawn said.

In addition to detentions, bans from extracurricular activities, and unexcused absences to prevent students from leaving campus, Acalanes administration appointed more campus supervisors to monitor students and ensure students are following school regulations.

"We have tried to step up having more eyes out during break time and lunchtime. We try [to] be at the exits [and] the entrances," Campus Supervisor Andy McDonald said.

Although Acalanes has implemented a stricter policy, these efforts may not have deterred all students, despite the threat of punishment. In the same *Blueprint* survey, 76 percent of student respondents who have left campus at some point this year reported that they have not faced consequences.

Despite the challenges, campus supervisors and administration have noticed a decrease in students violating this policy since the implementation of stricter security and consequences this year.

"I think we have definitely made some headway since we have started to tighten the screws a little bit ... Nobody wants to get detention, nobody. Even if it is an hour out of the day where you might be able to get things done, [do] your homework, catch up on things, study for a test or whatever, I think kids want to do that on their own time, they don't want to be forced to do it ... We definitely have seen a difference and hopefully it will continue," McDonald said.

The same anonymous survey that *Blueprint* conducted reflects this staff observation that the increased effort to enforce the policy this year has effectively deterred students from leaving campus without authorization.



58 percent of survey respondents who have left campus in previous years or earlier this school year reported that the new restrictions discouraged them from going off campus.

The consequences that some students have faced seems to also discourage their peers from leaving campus unauthorized, regardless if they faced repercussions.

"I got stopped and got in trouble for leaving campus a few weeks ago and since then, I haven't left campus during any break and none of my friends have either," Anonymous junior 2 said.

While many students fear receiving detention, others are more concerned with the possibility of losing out on participating in extracurricular activities.

"I'm scared of getting another detention because if you get caught twice, you're banned from extracurriculars. So if I got caught again, I wouldn't be able to play [my sport]," Anonymous senior said.

With the increased enforcement of the policy, students have expressed dissatisfaction with the tightened restrictions regarding leaving campus. These students believe going off campus is good for students and allows them to exercise individual freedom.

"Going off campus is a freedom all schools should have because it is a nice sense of responsibility for students, getting a feel for the real world, and college life. Also, some people may not have the opportunity to pack a lunch before school so it is a great alternate option," survey respondent 1 said.

"Going off campus is a freedom all schools should have because it is a nice sense of responsibility for students, getting a feel for the real world, and college life. Also, some people may not have the opportunity to pack a lunch before school so it is a great alternate option," survey respondent 1 said. "Also, going off campus can help students

if they are struggling, it can be a great alternate lunch activity. As long as they are on time to classes, it should not matter what students do during break periods."

The concept of providing opportunities for students to learn responsible habits has motivated some schools to permit students to leave campus during lunch and





other breaks. Alameda High School has an open campus only during lunch time. The school allows students to grab food during the lunch period but sets the strict consequence of detention if students are tardy for their next class period to ensure that it does not disrupt the school day.

"My school is located downtown so there's Peets, Starbucks, poke, Mexican [food], boba, everything so everyone goes off campus ... I really like having an open campus. Don't have lunch? Perfect. Want a physical break from school? Go off campus and relax during lunch. We also get student specials ... I love getting drinks as motivation or rewards after a hard test," Alameda senior Amy Nguyen said.

Other schools in the East Bay, such as San Ramon Valley High School (SRV), have an open campus. Although only seniors are allowed to go off campus to get lunch, lower grade levels often leave as well due to the school's proximity to San Ramon's City Center.

"I've left a couple times since I've been at SRV... [and] a lot of my friends go off campus at least once a week," SRV junior Hope Diekmann said. "SRV being downtown makes going off campus so much easier because there's a lot of food options just one minute away from our school so it's super quick to grab lunch anywhere."

SRV's neighboring high school, Monte Vista High School, is a closed campus de-

spite being in the same district, and has similar issues to Acalanes with student adherence to the policy.

"We are a closed campus, but everyone leaves. We have monitors in our parking lots and they try to prevent students from leaving, but many people just park on the street and leave campus," Monte Vista senior Sidonie Legare said.

Monte Vista High School and SRV may have differing policies despite being in the same district due to the distinct locations of both schools. SRV is located closer than Monte Vista High School is to restaurants and other off-campus locations that may attract students. However, many students feel like the district policies should not vary from sites within a district.

"I think it makes sense to a degree. Monte Vista is still close enough that people could get out and back in time, I just think it would be harder to enforce at SRV, but it seems weird that the policies are different," Legare said.

Administrators believe that what separates the AUHSD from other districts with open campus policies is the school's distance to downtown areas and restaurants. Acalanes is further from businesses and restaurants making students more likely to be late to classes after lunch.

"Acalanes is not really positioned in a place that's easy to sneak off campus, nor is it easy to go somewhere for lunch and then come back and still make your class, which would be different for a school like San Ramon Valley High School, which is right in the heart of downtown Danville ... You can walk across the street and you've got a string of restaurants," Bell said.

While Acalanes is not directly located in a downtown area, students are still in close enough proximity to restaurants and off campus to leave campus and return within the lunch period if traveling by car. Some wonder if increased enforcement will lead to alternative approaches for leaving the site.

"I believe [the policy] will only influence kids to find other, possibly more dangerous, ways to leave campus," survey respondent 1 said.

Some students have already noticed potentially dangerous behavior in efforts to leave campus this year.

"When I left campus, I noticed people driving pretty fast to get off campus, people who were speeding and things like that

which are pretty reckless," Anonymous junior 3 said.

Additionally, many students feel that enforcing the closed campus policy is not realistic, and students should face the natural consequences of leaving campus, without administrators attempting to police each individual.

"I feel like it should be on the student if they are late. They should be allowed to go, but if they're late to class, it's on them," survey respondent 2 said.

Despite many students

breaking the policy, others consider the issue's nuance, as it relates to administration's responsibility for the safety of students. Some consider potential improvements as this issue continues to unfold.

"I have never gone off campus during lunch because I don't have a car. [But] I think that Acalanes should allow students to go off campus [under certain circumstances]," survey respondent 3 said. "Students should agree that they are not liable for anything that happens off campus and that if [they] are not back by the next period, they will be given automatic detention. Overall, I think the closed campus policy is unfair, but it still makes sense, and I think Acalanes should implement a way to allow students to go off-campus during lunch," survey respondent 3 said.

Looking to the future, Acalanes and the AUHSD will continue enforcing the policy, and at this point do not plan on making Acalanes an open campus. In doing so, students will be able to take an active role in creating a more unified campus culture.

"We're responsible for student safety ... We're enforcing the closed campus policy more now because it's becoming more of an issue. It may not be worse than it's ever been, but ... it has become more noticeable in recent years. When students face consequences, it usually deters them from breaking the rules again. I'm hopeful that students will start following the rules more consistently," Shawn said.

"We were mostly concerned and worried about the student culture component, that students wouldn't connect as much on campus, or they wouldn't be engaged in lunch-time activities and things like that," former Acalanes principal Travis Bell said.

ARTS



Moonlight, Magic, and Mischief

*Behind the Scenes of the DramaDons' Production of
A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Cameron Powell, Zinnia Khan, Hannah Geraghty, and Jenna Kessler |
Online Editor-in-Chief, DEIB Director, and Business Managers
Photo by Zinnia Khan

Lights emerge on the fairy queen Titania as she awakens in a moonlit forest. The costume team watches offstage with attentive eyes, appreciating the delicate flower crown on the actress' head, nestled in her elaborately curled hair. An array of students skilled in stagecraft, makeup, hair, and costuming meticulously plan each element of every scene.

The Acalanes DramaDons' production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* premiered on Oct. 23 and ran through Oct. 26 in the Little Theater, resulting from months of work by students both on and off the stage.

The plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* involves a diverse range of characters and intertwined narratives. A group of actors attempts to put on a play, while four lovers quarrel and fights between fairy royalty spill into the human world. These plot lines all interconnect to tell one overarching story combining love and chaos.

"In the forest, there are these actors called the Mechanicals and they are practicing a play that they are going to put on for Theseus' wedding. Also in the forest are the fairy king and queen, Oberon and Titania, and they are having marital problems. Oberon's assistant Robin Goodfellow, also called Puck, is going to go do nefarious things in order to get back at Titania. In the end, the lovers get kind of a happy ending," actor for Theseus and junior Anika Deming said.

Some students have found value not only in the plot of this particular play but also in performing Shakespeare's work as a whole.

"A lot of the messages in Shakespeare are still relevant to a lot of things nowadays. Also, there is Shakespeare intertwined in legitimately pretty much all of media at this point, at least Western media. You will find quotes or just random tidbits that are from Shakespeare plays," actor for Oberon and senior Jesse Friedman said.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedy and some point out that despite the language complexity, the emotion that actors put into their roles allows the content to resonate with a modern audience.

"At the end of this play, there's a scene that is hysterically funny. It's over 400 years old and this piece of comedy still is hysterically funny, so that is universal. The fact that this material is so old, so enduring, it says something about it," drama teacher Ed Meehan said.

Rehearsals for the show took place three times a week and allowed students involved to develop a sense of community.

"I really like the structure of the rehearsals. All of the cast and crew are really just welcoming and kind and just amazing people. So it's been pretty smooth," actress for Hermia and frosh Noelle Dobies said.

In addition to running scenes, actors worked on understanding their roles and the context of their lines by collaborating with fellow performers.

"[I have been working on] character development with Anika because she plays my lover in the show, and it's really fun to work with her," actress for Hippolyta and sophomore GG Gallagher said.

The last week of rehearsal was dedicated to tech week, where the crew began to incorporate costumes, sets, and lighting.

"This week it's really incorporating people in stagecraft, especially lighting and sound... going through light cues and ... adding tech," Student Director and junior Everest Tomasello said.

Members of the stagecraft class deliver essential contributions by designing production elements, including the costumes and physical set.

"Usually, I like to draw up my original idea of what I want specific people to look like. Then, I will go to the costume shop located in Pleasant Hill. We will go and pick things out and go 'Oh, this would be great for that person or that would be great for this person. Then we will go back and mix and match the stuff," Costume Head and junior Addison Burton said.

As Costume Head, Burton decides what cast members will wear during the performance, piecing together looks with thematic and symbolic elements.

"I wanted the Mechanicals, the Romantics, and the Fairies to have cohesion, but then also be very different in their own way. The Mechanicals [wear] flannel and some ... jeans. The Fairies are very textured, very detailed, [and have] a lot of flowers and things like that. The Romantics are very traditional

Roman [and] Greek attire," Burton said.

Many cast and crew members wanted to make the costumes as accurate as possible to the time period in which the play takes place.

"Since it was written [during] the Renaissance [and] it was written about a different time period ... it's been hard to determine what people wear," Stage Manager, Prop Master, and senior Stella Byrne said.

In addition to costumes, stagecraft worked on creating a set and props, collaborating with actors and directors to ensure these components came together seamlessly.

"[There were] certain parts where they would have actors in certain places [that] wouldn't have worked so I would offer my advice on that stuff," Byrne said. "[Then] I compiled props and talked to the directors about what they needed prop-wise, and organized with actors how they were going to use their props."

Not only did students create sets and costumes for the production, but some also took a directorial role in the creative process. Tomasello and Production Assistant Evelyn Hollenberg playing key parts in directing the production, have been involved in directing theater since their times at Stanley Middle School, where they both assisted in running performances there. However, Shakespeare comes with its own challenges from the directing angle.

"Getting people to learn and understand Shakespeare, particularly to pronounce the words correctly, is a little bit difficult, they just tend to say things phonetically, which is not how English works unfortunately," Hollenberg said.

Many observed that all contributing parts of the play collaborate in order to put together the final product.

"A play is kind of a synthesis of all of the arts so ... actors come in and they do their parts but then ... the costume crew works with them and puts costumes on them, and then lights and sound, lights, in particular, are in charge of making sure they look good, so there's a lot of collaboration," Meehan said.

Working on the play provided an enriching and exciting experience for cast and crew alike.

"[A *Midsummer Night's Dream*] is very artistically and creatively done, especially with the costumes and the makeup bringing it to life. It's one of the more fun and whimsical parts of Shakespeare, and it's so much fun to see every day," Tomasello said.

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Power at the Polls

Examining artists' responsibility to publicly endorse political figures

Sela Sarbiewski and Samantha Swift | Staff Writers
Spread by Audrey Martin

Imagine asking someone from the 1800s how they think art influences politics; they'd likely reference a cartoon they saw in the newspaper last week, or perhaps a new poem they heard during election day. While newspapers continue to publish commentary in the form of artwork, modern political cartoons of the upcoming United States election have taken on brand-new elements. Social media and the growing influence of famous figures have dramatically changed how art influences politics.

In 1920, Al Jolson sang his support for future President Warren G. Harding, marking the first celebrity endorsement of a presidential candidate. Eight years later, Babe Ruth was the next to show support for a specific candidate, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As the years progressed more celebrities followed suit, sharing with the public who they planned to vote for in the next election. This year 2024, many fans expect that people with a platform should share their political affiliations. While political affiliations and sharing ones political stance has become increasingly normalized in modern society, celebrities do not have a responsibility to publicly share their political opinions, and the media should not pressure them to because only increase voting misinformation among American citizens.

Social media has become one of the main sources of political information. In the 2020 election, Pew Research Center found that about 55 percent of the entire adult population in the U.S. went online to learn more information about the candidates. It was relatively recently, in 2008, that candidates began to use the internet and social media as valuable campaign tools.

While the media can serve as a viable source for education and endorsement, it is also often ridden with bias and misinformation. Many news sources have an inherent bias that targets their articles to a certain demographic. The same goes for social media where people can post almost anything they want thanks to the right of free speech.

With a large following on social media, prominent figures like songwriters and celebrities can sway public opinion with a click of a button. When someone sees their favorite celebrity supporting a specific candidate or proposition, they may be more inclined to agree with that opinion without completing individual research.

According to a study from the Pew Research Center, 25 percent of voters 18-29 years old

proved to be more likely to support a candidate endorsed by a celebrity they admire.

Prominent businessman and entrepreneur Elon Musk announced that he would give away one million dollars to registered voters in swing states in a statement on Oct. 19. Some may interpret Musk's actions as a form of bribery by only allowing those who are registered in the seven battleground states to participate. After publicizing his plan, many began to question whether it violated federal law. Although it is not yet clear whether Musk's actions are against the law, there is an obvious bias. Offering a cash prize may tempt people to vote for money over their values and beliefs.

Other celebrities like Kanye West and Kid Rock have also promoted their biases and publicly endorsed Donald Trump. Similarly, Stephen Curry and Billie Eilish shared that they will be voting for Kamala Harris. Publicly sharing is their prerogative, but their status makes this more nuanced and sharing desired candidates may lead to unrest in the future.

Instead, promotion of voting engagement and individual research on proposed measures and party candidates is a healthy way to contribute to a well-versed election turnout representative of the diverse opinions of American voters.

Taylor Swift's use of her fame to encourage eligible voters to register and research candidates before voting illustrates this point in her post on Sept. 10, where Swift shared her plans to vote for Harris, however she also encouraged her fans to "do their own research," voting for the candidate that best represents their beliefs. Swift followed the statement by sharing the vote.org link to her 283 million followers. According to the National Public Radio, Swift's post amassed a total of 35,000 new registered voters along with increasing site traffic by 1,226 percent.

While the power that celebrities hold over political outcomes can be dangerous, there are some healthy ways they can support democracy. Although celebrities do not have a responsibility to publicly endorse political figures, use of a large reaching platform to encourage independent voting can strengthen a more representative election process.

Book Nook

Mental Health in Literature: Fictional Characters Facing Real Problems

Spread by Audrey Martin

Alone With You in the Ether by Olivie Blake

Gwyneth Lee | Staff Writer

"Can you love my brain even when it is small? When it is malevolent? When it is violent? Can you love it even when it does not love me?"

Olivie Blake's *Alone With You in the Ether* brings together two opposites: Regan, a counterfeit artist living with bipolar disorder, who finds life mundane and tedious, and Aldo, a doctoral student struggling with undefined mental challenges. Regan constantly looks for an impulsive action to break the repetitive cycle of her day to day life, while Aldo uses rules and formulas to create a framework of thoughts he can cope with. The two live messy, complicated lives, and often disappear into their own minds. However, their meeting in the Art Institution shakes the foundation of the lives they have conformed to. As they fall in love with each other, they learn to love themselves and the lives they live.

The book follows a unique format, bouncing between the characters' points of view and combining the first and third person. The characters are complex, and though they ex-

perience growth, their foundational characteristics remain constant. Their humanity is affirmed as they query obscure theories and philosophies of life. *Alone With You in the Ether* is a great late-night read for anyone needing reminders that they're not alone.

My Year of Rest and Relaxation by Ottessa Moshfegh

Helena McGinley | News Copy Editor

"In my frenzied state of despair, I understood: there was stability in living in the past."

My Year of Rest and Relaxation centers around the life of a young, wealthy, unnamed protagonist living in New York. In a format similar to diary entries, Moshfegh gives readers a glimpse into the psyche of a woman who seems to have it all; wealth and endless time, but feels a profound sense of emptiness.

The book begins with the protagonist creating a plan to sleep with the help of medication through the next year. She enlists the help of a malpractice psychiatrist to help with her plan and successfully gathers enough medication to sleep through the year. The book provides readers short scenes describing the protagonist's conscious states, with time frame and context continuously shifting. While there is not a typical story arc plot, *My Year of Rest and Relax-*

ation is a fascinating read that explores depression, medication, and the human brain.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky

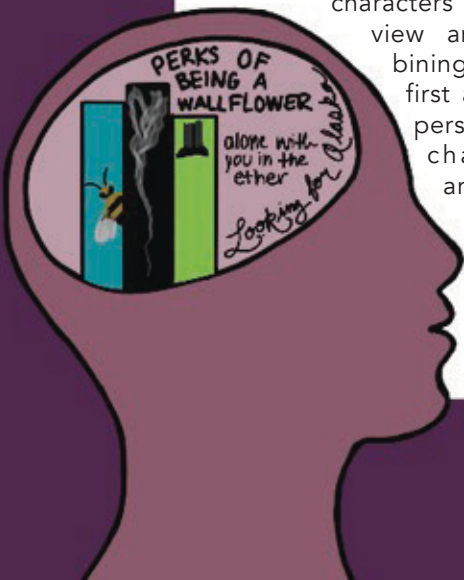
Audrey Parkin | Online Editor

"We accept the love we think we deserve"

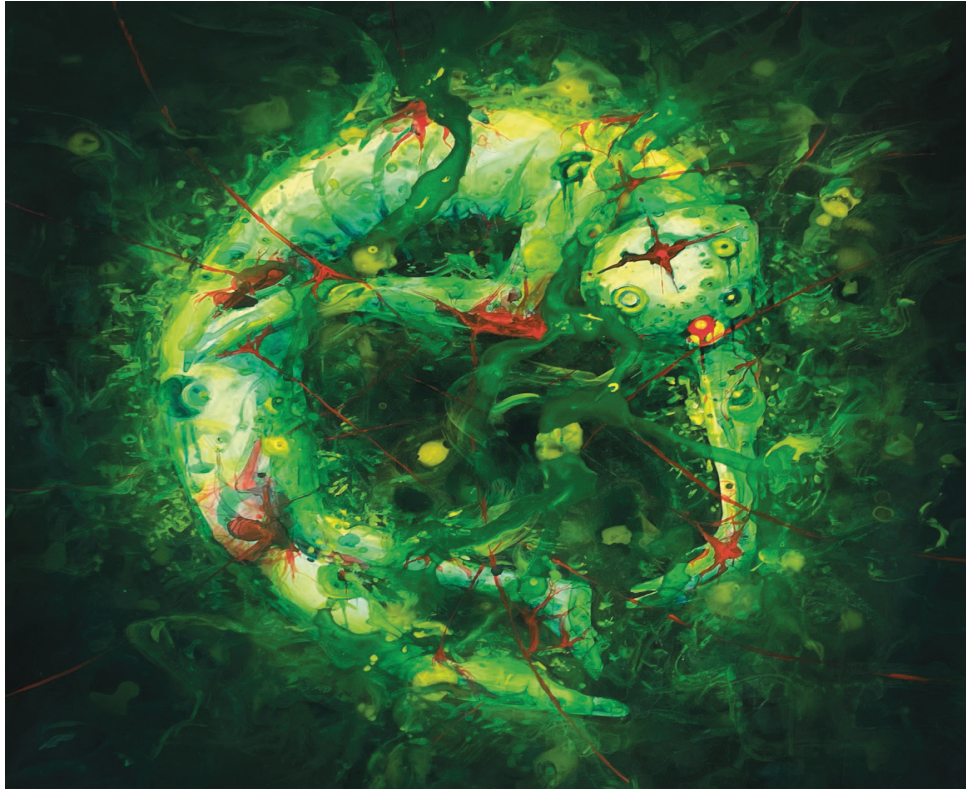
The Perks of Being a Wallflower is a realistic fiction coming-of-age novel made up of letters the main character, Charlie, sends to an anonymous friend. Set in Pittsburgh in the early 1990s, the plot follows the experiences of socially awkward and introverted Charlie during his frosh year of high school.

The reader accompanies Charlie as he grapples with the challenges of adolescence and confronting universal highschool experiences from exciting new friendships to the heartbreak of losing your first love.

Through forming deep connections with peers and confronting typical high school experiences, Charlie discovers the importance of strong relationships. The book's candid and informal narrative style invites the reader into Charlie's thoughts, allowing the reader to connect with his successes and failures. Through Charlie's eyes, the audience lives his quest for acceptance and belonging, making the story both relatable and impactful for readers of all ages.



ARTIST OF THE ISSUE



Emily Bennet

Digital artist Emily Bennet's philosophy, perspective, and process

Melina Galacatos and Audrey Parkin | Online Editor and Staff Writer
Graphic by Emily Bennet

Art is a method of representing one's imagination, but beyond the surface-level expressions are detailed looks into the minds and emotions of an artist. Delicate brushstrokes, striking chords, graceful spins, eye-catching bright colors, and detailed patterns all convey part of a creative story.

For senior Emily Bennet, art is the truest form of self-expression. Her motivations are deeper than wanting to create something beautiful or convey a single idea. Instead, her artwork is a vivid glimpse into her mind.

"I think a lot. There [are] a lot of thoughts up here, and if they all sort of sit up there it's really easy to get lost. So the best way for me to work through those feelings and express those thoughts is through artwork. That's how I organize myself, that's how I express myself," Bennet said.

Bennet's artistic process draws inspiration from unconventional ideas, and her execution leads to work with vast originality.

"She has some sort of philosophical crazy idea[s] like the mind when you're asleep.

Whenever she goes into an art process she'll come up with these crazy ideas and somehow she'll make it real and turn this idea into a piece of art," junior Lucy Love said.

Even though her work is personal, Bennet shares many pieces openly on her website, with her friends and at local community events and competitions. Recently, she presented two of her pieces, *Ego*, and a self-portrait titled *Seventeen*, at a local art exhibition called *Art Embraces Poetry*.

"You can go in and either be a featured poet or a featured artist. What I did was I went up, and I talked about my visual art, but anybody can sign up...[and] go on the open mic that they have," Bennet said.

By putting her art out in the open, she conveys the emotions and ideas that inspired the piece and her process, and themes that may be relatable or interesting to her audience. Her piece *Seventeen* was about her experience growing up mixedrace and sparked conversation and connection with

viewers.

"My self-portrait was about a lot of the feelings that I had growing up being mixed race feeling like I couldn't fit into either category and how that applied to different aspects of my life. Even if there weren't a lot of mixed race people in the crowd, a lot of people resonated with what I had to say because I had a lot of people come up and talk to me afterward," Bennet said.

One person's artwork can be a conversation starter or inspiration for someone else, and Bennet credits this collaboration as one of her major interests and artistic influences.

"[I like] working with other people [with] diverse perspectives, and exploring what other people have to say and [learn] their stories. I love stories, I love hearing all those weird and unique ways that people express themselves through art," Bennet said.

At *Acalanes*, Bennet acts as a mentor to many of her classmates, providing insight and advice on the artwork of her peers.

Continues on 30

Ruebner's Records

A Review of Geordie Greep's *The New Sound* and Charli XCX's *brat* and it's completely different but also still brat

Cole Ruebner | Contributing Writer

Spread by Justin Rosenblatt

The New Sound - Geordie Greep

The lead vocalist of the legendary experimental and progressive rock band Black Midi has finally come out with his long-awaited solo album, and the toughest critics could not be more excited.

The instrumental palette on this album is challenging, to say the least. There are countless key and time changes through most songs, employed in ways that feel so odd and out of nowhere that it somehow works. The music never stays stagnant for more than a couple of measures, constantly switching up in exciting and unexpected ways. I would not say that the instrumentation on this project is accessible, but it would be a far easier introduction to

the prog and jazz-rock genre than any of Greep's old band, Black Midi's,

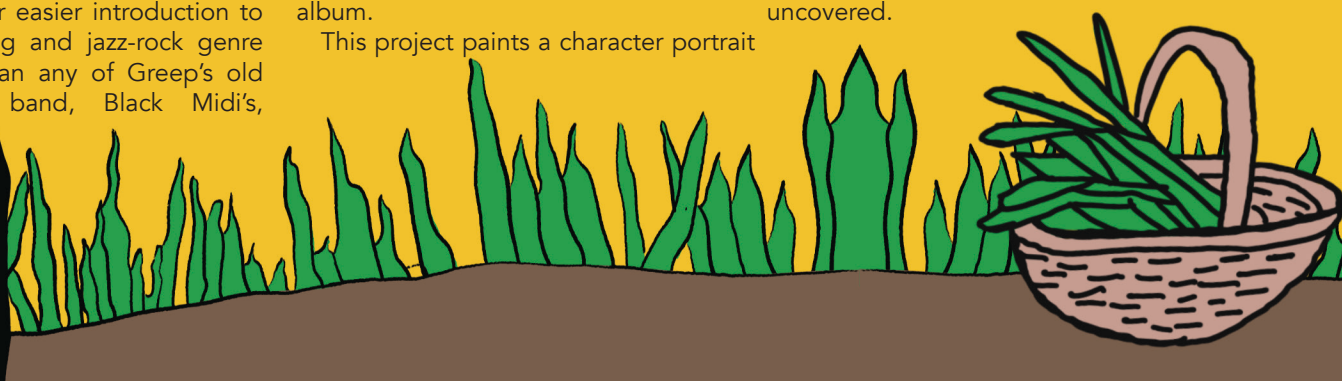
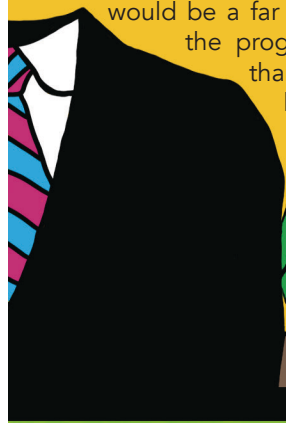
earlier works. Take the title track for example. Even without any lyrical contribution from Greep, the exhilarating jazz synthesis speaks for itself. The guitar and drum work is wonderfully complex but still packaged in a loose and relaxed way. There are abrasive elements, but there are also aspects of it that shine with glamor and grace.

While the project's overall musicality is one of a kind, the lyrical focus in every track takes it to the next level. Greep employs his signature maniacal spoken-word delivery, shouting dense, deeply poetic lyrics in a hypnotic rhythm. *The New Sound* is undoubtedly a concept album.

This project paints a character portrait

of a deeply troubled man trapped in delusions of grandeur and ego. It is often unclear whether or not this person indeed agrees with what they say or is simply saying it until they believe themselves. Still, this person that Greep embodies delivers such absurd and unbelievable bluster that it is hard to distinguish what is real and what isn't.

While this album will not appeal to everyone, it deserves appreciation for its uniqueness and boundary-pushing talent. It is musically and lyrically challenging, but underneath those layers of discomfort, or perhaps because of them, there is a truly unique album experience waiting to be uncovered.



Brat and it's completely different but also still brat - Charli XCX

Amidst releases from so many chart-topping artists this past year, from Sabrina Carpenter to Chappell Roan to even Taylor Swift, one album managed to stand above the rest thanks to clever marketing, brilliant aesthetics, and, most importantly, genuinely good music. *Brat* by Charli XCX should have been an underdog, with club-centric hyperpop sounds that, at first glance, seemed far from radio-friendly. Yet, against all odds, it emerged as one of the most popular albums of 2024. After all, it was neither a short and sweet summer nor a tortured poet's summer. It was a brat summer. So, coming off of such a massively successful album, Charli XCX saw it fit to release a remixed version with at least one guest artist featured on each song. And, while the original is good enough that it does not need these additions, I can't complain about the fact that they happened

anyway.

This expanded edition is, expectedly, a mixed bag. With so many voices taking over each song, it really does feel like a melting pot of creativity. While, in theory, this makes for an extremely fun idea, it becomes both an advantage and a disadvantage in the long run.

The new and revamped tracks feel less like do-overs and more like extensions of the original songs. Take the track "So I," for example, now featuring producer and longtime collaborator A.G. Cook. The original song detailed the ups and downs of Charli's relationship with the late producer and songwriter SOPHIE. It is a moving song that goes over the regrets Charli battled after her friend's untimely passing. The new version, takes the time to detail happy memories that the artist cherishes, taking on a far sweeter and more reflective tone.

While some songs do feel like genuine extensions, others tend to fall short of

their original counterparts. Some tracks just seem to exist for the sake of seeing two unlikely artists collaborate. The remix of "Von Dutch" bafflingly features Addison Rae: the TikTok sensation that found success in the music industry seemingly overnight with her song "Diet Pepsi." While it is fun to see the two voices come together on the same song, it ends up feeling hollow and pointless, failing to hold a candle to the emotions of the original track. There is also "Mean Girls," the biggest disappointment for me on the tracklist. As an avid Strokes fan, I was extremely excited to see lead singer Julian Casablancas featured on this song, but the gratuitous autotune and messy drum lines really distract from what could have been an incredible collaboration.

While *brat and it's completely different but also still brat* was never going to be as great as the original, it is, at the very least, a fun idea that serves as an adequate victory lap for the album that took over this past summer.

QUOTE OF THE ISSUE



Olivia Foster | Head Section Editor

Graphic by Sof Cerruti

"We don't belong to the same boat, it's the storm we share." - Amble

Thunder claps and the sea rolls with fury. Waves are violently colliding with the body of the wooden boat. The sky is impossibly obscure, an opaque gray mist overtaken by heavy raindrops. Eyes wide open, yet nothing. Nothing, except a light in the distance. The light is coming from another boat. It is a flashing light that ignites the sky for a moment and then retracts to envelop all life in complete darkness once more. The light comes from somewhere in the near distance. Somewhere where the rain still falls painfully onto skin, and where the water shatters any protection the boat provides. The glow comes from another boat, a different boat, caught in the same storm. The storm persists, but no longer is it isolating – it is a shared storm.

Earlier this year, my mom played a new song for me that a friend recommended. The guitar caught my attention first, then

the folk-sounding voice of the man in the song, but the lyrics that I heard most stuck with me. The song "Tonnta" sings, "We don't belong to the same boat, It's the storm we share." Hearing those words, I felt embraced by people who weren't physically with me. I understood that though my journey differs from those around me, we all exist within a shared space filled with challenges that are more alike than we think.

Throughout my senior year, I have been reminded of these different journeys that my peers will soon pursue. Some of us want to go to a four-year college, some want to travel, some want to learn a trade, and some do not know. These are our boats. We travel in different vessels because each of these vessels carries us closer to our desired destination in life. What we have in common is the task of taking the next

step after high school, taking the next step towards our future. This is our storm. We don't know yet where we are going and we don't have certainty that we will get to where we want to go. Yet oddly, there is solace in that. Uncertainty alone feels overwhelming and detached. A collective uncertainty feels somewhat right. It is not wrong or worrisome to feel uncertain and scared at this time in my life because I am not the only one who feels this way.

In a way, I think life is a constant storm. Sometimes, the storm lightens up and the skies look bluer. Sometimes, we wonder when or if we will find the light again. In these moments—the darker times in life—we must remember: we are not alone. Many people are also looking for the light, even if we can't yet see them in the dark.

Artist of the Issue

Continued from 28

"She is a very good person to rely on as far as constructive critique. She is not afraid to share her opinions ... [and] often is able to explain to other students what is problematic with their work and offers some suggestions on how to fix it. She is all around a great colleague to her fellow artists," art teacher Robert Porter said.

Bennet hopes to turn her passion into a career in the entertainment industry, specifically, making concept art for a production.

"I've always loved videogames and films because I think that it's some of the purest forms of art because when you think about it, it involves almost every form of art," Bennet said. "I love the idea of working on a team with those people and getting to see all those different experiences."

No matter how she uses her artistic skill, Bennet sees creative expression as an integral part of her life.

"Any form of art is just a means to an end to me. Even art itself is just a means to an end. I need to be making art, it's not a want to me, it's a need," Bennet said.

*Olivia Silverstein, Staff Writer, contributed interviews to this article

RECIPE OF THE ISSUE



Mac and Cheese Stuffed Peppers

Halloween Edition

Tatum McElhattan, Maya Stafford, and Neve Murphy | Print Arts Editors and Print Opinion Editor

Photo by Tatum McElhattan

Enjoy the comforting taste of fall with this unique take on mac and cheese, baked to perfection inside vibrant bell peppers. This rich, creamy pasta is seasoned with nutty fall spices and stuffed into the sweet shells of bell peppers for a comforting taste. Perfect for cozy dinners or more festive gatherings, this recipe brings a warm and seasonal touch to any meal.

Ingredients

1 tsp. of salt
½ tsp. of pepper
6 orange bell peppers
12 oz. of elbow macaroni
1 ¼ cups gruyère cheese
1 cup sharp cheddar cheese
1 cup white cheddar cheese
1 cup heavy cream
1 tsp. light brown sugar
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
¼ tsp. ground nutmeg
2 cloves of minced garlic

Instructions

1. Fill a large pot with water and bring to a boil. Add a generous amount of salt. Fill another bowl with ice water.
2. Cut the peppers' tops off, remove the seeds, and put the peppers and their tops in boiling water for two to three minutes.
3. Put the peppers in the ice water and once cooled carve out jack-o'-lantern faces with a knife.
4. Add macaroni to boiling water for about six minutes. Keep one cup of pasta

water for later.

5. Heat the heavy cream and cheese in a large saucepan until it begins to simmer; continue for ten minutes.
6. Whisk in the spices and minced garlic until there are no more lumps.
7. In a separate bowl, combine the macaroni and the cheese sauce. If needed, use the pasta water to thin the sauce. Let it cool for about ten minutes.
8. Use a spoon to put the macaroni and cheese into each pepper. Once you've finished, put the top on.

BlueTunes

Songs that dads play

Livi Foster and Zoe Stafford | Head Section Editor
and Azure Editor-in-Chief



Whether it's rock or 80s pop, "dad music" will always bring a nostalgic feeling and a smile. While everyone has a different music taste, dad songs just have a specific ring, there's no other way to describe it. This playlist consists of some all-time favorite dad songs that will take you back to your childhood. Please enjoy!



A *Taste* of *Fall*

A review of Philz Coffee, Peet's Coffee, and Starbucks fall drinks

Avery Robb and Zoe Stafford |
Print Editor-in-Chief and Azure
Editor-in-Chief

Photos by Avery Robb and
Zoe Stafford

Spread by Maya Agarwal |
Print Editor-in-Chief

As the leaves begin to change color and the air becomes crisp, local coffee shops bring in a delightful new array of fall seasonal drinks.

Blueprint tasted a variety of beverages from Philz Coffee, Peet's Coffee and Starbucks and gave a rating out of 5 leaves, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest.



Iced Vanilla Date Delight

The Iced Vanilla Date Delight is a sweet and creamy celebration of fall flavors. This drink is made with Philz' Philtered Soul Cold Brew, a rich blend containing notes of hazelnut, maple, and caramel. It is paired with a dash of vanilla and date syrup for an extra touch of sweetness. The sprinkle of cinnamon adds a warm, classic autumn vibe, creating a more well-rounded flavor. The layer of oat milk foam on the top of the drink is a delightful final touch. Although the drink lacks a strong coffee flavor, it is ideal for anyone craving a sweet afternoon drink and is best served iced with light sweetness and medium creaminess.

Philz

Spiced Vanilla Soul

The Philz Spiced Vanilla Soul was a fan favorite for the *Blueprint* reviewers. The drink starts off strong with the Philtered Soul Cold Brew base, which is delicious on its own. Of course, it has vanilla syrup, but what really tied the whole thing together was the spiced oat milk. The oat milk mix carries the cinnamon flavor in every sip, leaving a sweet fall flavor aftertaste. Initially, the *Blueprint* reviewers tried this drink at medium sweetness and creaminess levels which diluted the flavor of the cold brew considerably. For a stronger coffee flavor, the ideal combination is light sweetness and creaminess.



Peet's

Iced Maple Oat Milk Latte

The Iced Maple Oat Milk Latte tastes exactly how one would expect. Made with Baridi cold brew, this drink is a twist on Peet's signature Cold Brew Oat Latte. The subtle notes of maple and cinnamon sugar complement the coffee flavor, making the perfect pairing for any occasion. The oat milk adds a pleasant nutty flavor, although it does leave a grainy texture in the drink. Nonetheless, this cozy fall beverage is *Blueprint's* top pick for fall due to its balance of rich coffee and maple. This drink is best served on ice, and if you prefer a bolder coffee flavor, request one less pump of syrup.

Pumpkin Latte

The Peet's Iced Pumpkin Latte was lacking both in pumpkin and in latte. While its simple base of espresso, steamed milk, and pumpkin pie syrup sounds like the perfect fall drink, this latte left the bitter taste of disappointment. For any coffee lover, the subtle hint of espresso one would expect in a latte was not there. Contributing to the lack of this smooth flavor is the overpowering pumpkin pie syrup that settled at the bottom of the drink. Somehow, every sip left both a sweet and bitter taste behind, making the whole experience of the pumpkin latte unpleasant. The Peet's Iced Pumpkin Latte receives a 1/5 rating overall, and only one in four *Blueprint* reviewers enjoyed this fall drink.



Iced Apple Crisp Oat Milk Shaken Espresso

The Iced Apple Crisp Oat Milk Shaken Espresso is true to its name. Made with Starbucks' blond espresso roast, this drink is a mixture of light coffee, crisp apple, and sweet brown sugar flavors. This coffee is shaken together, creating a smooth texture with a light frothy oat milk foam on top. This drink has a very distinct and acquired taste and is very reminiscent of the autumn air as one walks through an apple orchard. Although this drink was not a *Blueprint* favorite, this is the drink for those looking for a unique fall experience.

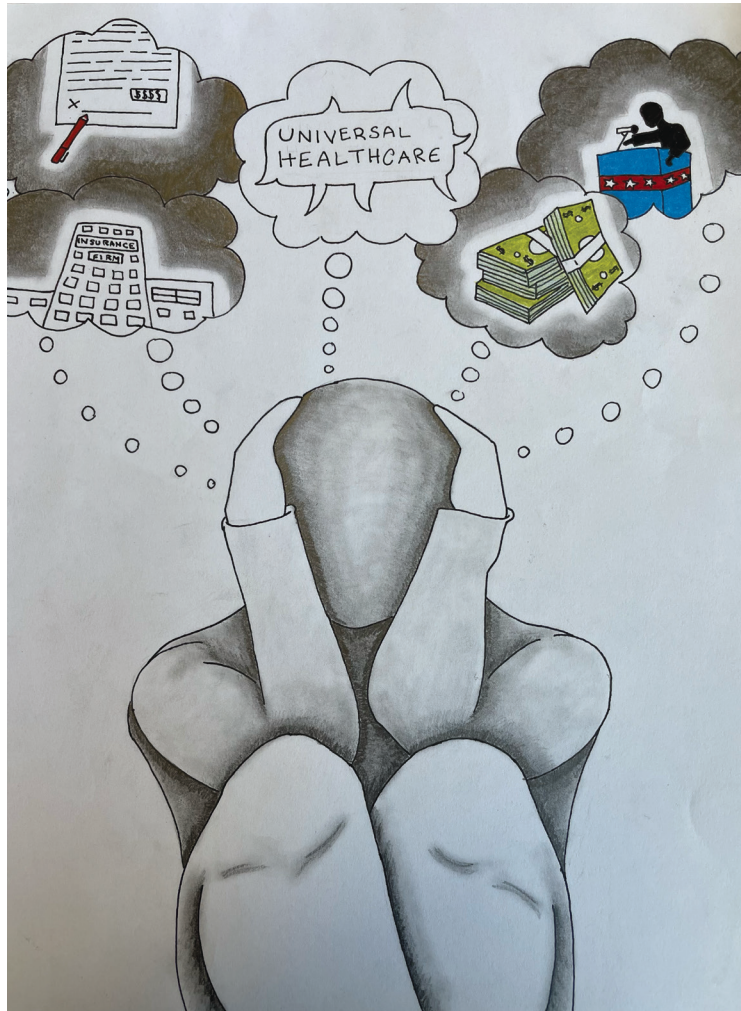
Iced Pumpkin Spice Latte

The Starbucks Iced Pumpkin Spice Latte was a much-needed pick-me-up following the Peet's Latte. The Starbucks Signature Espresso is a strong base that carries the drink and gives a bittersweet taste. However, the promise of 'real pumpkin' flavoring was lacking yet again. The taste is just sweet instead of autumn, leaning more toward a vanilla latte. Despite its flaws, this latte was a good drink, just nothing special. All-in-all, this fall drink received a 3/5 for its good, but not quite fall flavors.



Starbucks

OPINION



High Time for Universal Health Care

Examining the United States' health care system and necessary changes

Molly Connelly | Print Feature Editor

Graphic by Sof Cerruti

When I was five years old, I closed a car door on my left pinky finger. Having only been on the Earth for 1825 days, the idea of blood gushing from my finger was a terrifying one. My mother immediately took me to the hospital, and medical professionals very carefully glued the skin on my finger back together. I remember this so vividly because a very kind nurse let me pick out a stuffed animal. I chose a pink hippopotamus that I held onto for years to come.

The United States government does not guarantee this kind of health care for all teary-eyed five-year-olds across the nation. When I was in the hospital, I did not understand that I was privileged

enough to receive the care that I needed. My parents only had to worry about me feeling better, not whether or not they could afford my health care. Depending on a family's financial status, health care is not guaranteed.

Universal health care refers to a system in which every citizen can access health care services that the government funds. This is the standard for 73 nations across the globe, from the Netherlands to Kuwait.

The United States has a moral obligation to provide universal health care, and in the long run, the country will benefit by providing its citizens with health care that meets the ethical standard of care

for a developed nation with the resources to care for its citizens.

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies a country as a provider of universal health care when "all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship." The WHO argues that this is a moral obligation because, by their definition, universal health care is a fundamental human right.

Universal health care has been politicized dating back to the early 20th century. President Franklin D. Roosevelt considered including health care in the original Social Security Act of 1935, however, dropped it due to political opposition. 30 years later in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced Medicare and Medicaid, programs that demonstrated greater government involvement in the care of the elderly or impoverished citizens.

Currently, the United States functions with a mixed health care system that has an emphasis on private insurance and employer-sponsored insurance plans. There are also government programs like Medicare to provide health care for the elderly and Medicaid for low-income individuals.

Due to the predominance of private insurance, where individuals or families purchase insurance plans or their employers provide coverage, health insurance is limited to those who can afford it or acquire a job that provides it. In 2022, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) study, 64 percent of nonelderly people who were not insured said that it was because coverage was too expensive. That study also concluded that many of those without coverage due to expenses are not eligible for Medicaid assistance.

The significance of universal health care is that individuals do not depend on private insurance. According to the same KFF study, someone without health insurance is more likely to experience a lower quality of health care and is more likely to delay or forgo necessary treatment.

In other instances, uninsured individuals undergo essential treatment that they have no means of paying for, leading to an accumulation of debt from medical bills. This creates financial stress for individuals and may deter them from seeking future treatment.

Empower Teens Through the Ballot

Exploring the potential of Calif. Legislation surrounding youth suffrage

Sof Cerruti | Senior Graphics Editor

Graphic by Sof Cerruti



When I was 13, I was sitting on the couch next to my dad, leafing through the voter information guide he had left on the table. At that moment in time, no part of me was that interested in its contents. I was simply bored on a Saturday. There was this one page, though, the page that described Proposition 18, that made me pause. I stopped the mindless page-flipping and actually started to read. I began to read about myself.

Even at my young, inexperienced age, I understood that I eventually wanted to be a voter who had an active role in the election of the United States' next president.

California 2020 Proposition 18 was an attempt to make any 17-year-old who would be 18 by the time of the next presidential election eligible to vote in the primary elections. Dominant political parties hold primary elections and debates early in the election cycle with the intention of selecting a main party

candidate. The said chosen candidate will eventually be on the campaign trail running for president. This proposition had never appeared on a ballot before, but the state legislature had considered it five other times, voting it down each time before the 2020 election. In 2020, 56 percent of Calif. voters voted no, solidifying the voting precedent the legislature had set before.

Before reading this proposition, I had never questioned the voting age. To me, 18 meant adulthood, and adulthood meant maturity. I just agreed with my family and friends when they said that those who are not legal adults are too young to vote as if a switch magically clicked as soon as they turned 18. Now, I realize there are so many other factors to consider before impulsively withholding an opportunity for mentally maturing teenagers. 17-year-olds should not be denied a chance to actively participate in the democratic process early on if they

will be legally able to cast their own ballot in November.

Yes, there is absolutely something to be said about underdeveloped frontal lobes in teenagers that should be considered when allowing them to make important decisions. However, frontal lobes do not finish developing until about 25 years of age, making the small change in maturity from ages 17 to 18 minuscule in comparison. Their opinions should not be voided based on this minor difference.

A major talking point surrounding young voters is the supposed danger of pressure from their immediate family members. While this may be true, familial influence is a two-way street. According to the magazine *Education Week*, even if it is in an election stimulation at school, if kids vote, their parents are more likely to do so as well. While it is true that many young people are influenced by how their parents vote, it is also true that their parents are more likely to be politically active if their kids show some sort of interest. When both kids and their parents are taking part in the election process, the act of voting becomes even more inclusive.

The primaries are a vital part of the election process, and it is important for teens to be able to place a vote on these early elections, in addition to the presidential election. Not only are there many opposing viewpoints within specific parties, but there are even different ways to carry out actions on topics that candidates may agree on. If teens are not actively participating in the campaign trail from the beginning, they are less likely to be open-minded and think for themselves. Instead of supporting a candidate from the beginning of the process through research and personal opinion, these young voters might succumb to the pressure of party politics. This would inevitably lead to a heavily polarized election turnout, more so than if they vote a little bit before they turn 18.

Additionally, according to the news website *Vox*, an extremely small percentage of voters actually change their minds during the presidential debate. Most voters change, form, and explore their views during their preferred party's primary debate, making the primaries a vital part of the election process.

One of the biggest factors in deciding an election is publicizing and advertisement strategies. Advertisements

can make or break a campaign. Take the successes of both Dwight D. Eisenhower and Barack Obama. With simple, memorable slogans, they changed the game of historic and modern advertisement. Eisenhower had his “Like Ike” commercials that resonated with America at the time, often regardless of political parties. Obama’s “Yes We Can” advertisements had a simple but powerful message that even celebrities backed.

In terms of breaking a campaign, George Bush Sr. checked his watch one time during a round of questions, and the other side jumped. All of a sudden, the media painted him as a president who was bored with his job and uncommitted to the United States. His supposed lack of enthusiasm was publicized quickly and aggressively, leading to the downfall of

his second presidential run.

Political advertisements have taken over social media platforms with influencers breaking down the policies and actions of candidates. Candidates themselves have used social media to gain support for their campaigns. These political campaign strategies are reaching an audience that is not able to vote, with 93 percent of social media users being under the age of 18 according to customer service platform Sentiment.

Winning the youth vote is a huge win for whichever candidate is able to do so. Advertisements aimed at teenagers, even those who can not vote yet, are absolutely crucial. Today’s youth voters are easily the most diverse group in American history with surveys reporting diversity across race, gender, class, sexuality,

and other intersections of identity. This is a crucial category to nail down, especially because 40 million potential voters (one-fifth of the electorate) are 18 to 34 years of age, according to the League of Women Voters. Young people are a huge factor in all elections anyway.

Now, I am freshly 18 and able to vote in a groundbreaking election for the next president of the United States. If there had been a primary election this year, I would have been a part of that process. Include us in the centuries-long process that makes our country what it is. After all, it will soon be our demographic and generation rising through the ranks and governing the nation. Why not let us vote in the primaries and give us a little more power to educate and represent ourselves along the way?

Universal Health Care

Continued from 34

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The reason that many supporters of minimal government involvement in health care do not want to give up the system of privatized health care in the United States is because they fear health care quality will diminish. However, an American Academy of Physician Associates poll stated that 70 percent of Americans feel that the current health care system fails to meet their needs, meaning that the country may be ready for a drastic change.

Many found the first signs of positive change in the 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA) passed under President Barack Obama. The ACA is a health care reform law that requires U.S. citizens and legal residents to have health care insurance. It also provided a tax credit to lower the cost of health care for households between 100 percent and 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Additionally, the Act expanded Medicaid coverage to all adults with income below 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

The goal of the ACA was to make health insurance available to more people, but it does not guarantee any kind of universal health care. It received extensive backlash politically, as many argued that it demanded too much government involvement and used too many taxpayer

dollars. As of May 2024, 37 percent of Americans had an unfavorable view of the ACA, according to a KFF poll.

That same poll surveyed based on partisanship, finding that nine in ten Democrats view the ACA favorably, while only three in ten Republicans favor the ACA. The problem with this viewpoint is that quality of health care is not a political issue, it is a moral responsibility concerning the lives of Americans.

This means that to catch up with the rest of the world’s moral standards for health care, there needs to be greater education about the real impacts of universal health care. Many Americans view the privatized system as the most effective way to prolong their lives and receive quality health care, as they can exercise greater control.

However, the average life expectancy in the United States is 77.5 years. Sweden, a country with a history of universal health care and government-funded initiatives, has a life expectancy of 83.16 years, and this trend remains true across developed nations offering universal health care.

Arguments against universal health care in the United States push the idea that Americans have access to more advanced health care and medical advancements than any other nation in the world. This is true to a degree. According to an article by William C. Hsiao in *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, on average, Americans experience shorter wait times

for advanced and specialty surgeries, including orthopedic surgeries.

Yet, the United States life expectancy is still lower than other nations. America’s standard of care as a whole falls behind other countries because only privileged individuals are able to afford this advanced care.

If more Americans were aware that they would receive better care and even have the potential to live a longer life, the issue of universal health care may not be a politicized one. The key to moving into the moral standards for the developed world is to help Americans consider the fact that the United States falls behind in health care and help shift this into an issue that goes beyond politics.

Additionally, the financial limitations of the current health care system cause individuals without care in the United States to experience a lower standard of care compared to nations with universal coverage. If the United States’ government takes a more active role through universal programs that guarantee coverage, they will be able to balance out the inequities in the health care system today.

In nations with universal health care, the government takes responsibility for the care of a five-year-old’s bleeding finger and understands that all of their citizens have a right to health care that does not push them into extreme debt. It is time for the United States to take on that responsibility too.

Forced to Choose

The complexities and challenges of understanding mixed-race identities

Sameed Marco | Online Content Manager

Graphic by Bo Chevaleau



Are you sure?" is the most common response to finding out my racial background. Other times, people ask, "Really?" with looks of disbelief and mental reprocessing. My identity as a mixed individual of South Asian and white heritage is often not aligned with how I am viewed. I often feel pressure to fit into just one category. I feel that even those who know my race often picture me as one identity and brush the others to the side.

Race affects people with mixed backgrounds in a unique way, as they do not fit neatly into the categories society has created over time. A legacy of policies and legislation with the goal of simplifying complex racial identities has led to Americans lacking in their understanding of mixed-race identities. This ignorance does and continues to have harmful impacts on the

polarization of racial issues and identities.

The practice of trying to classify mixed-raced individuals as a single identity was rooted in the foundations of America. In the English colonies, enslavers often sexually assaulted enslaved individuals or forced them into sexual exploitation, leading to a mixed-race population. In the 1660s, colonial authorities passed Slave Codes intended to protect the institution of slavery which detailed that only Black individuals could be enslaved. These laws created a necessity to legally classify people as Black or white and left no room for anything in between. States passed racial purity laws and the concept of the "one-drop rule," which classified individuals with one-thirty-secondth of non-white heritage as Black in order to make these

racial distinctions.

After the Civil War and abolition of slavery, American society maintained racial distinctions through Jim Crow laws. These laws included segregation of public facilities and housing, furthering divides between racial groups and defining mixed-race individuals by a single race.

This narrow understanding of mixed-race identities and pressures to embrace one identity over another still exist today. According to Pew Research Center data compiled in 2015, only 40 percent of multiracial adults identify as mixed race.

Mixed race marriage was prohibited under Jim Crow laws and was not nationally legalized until the 1967 Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia*. According to the Pew Research Center, mixed-race births have increased tenfold since 1970.

Even as mixed race populations grow, problems with how the government collects data on mixed-race individuals continue to arise. For example, before 2000, Americans could only select one race on the census. Additionally, the way the census conflates race, ethnicity, nationality, and language further confuses people with already complex mixed identities. The census asks surveyors if they are of "Hispanic, Latin, or Spanish origin," combining linguistic, ethnic, and national identities into a single label, exemplifying how racial identities are often oversimplified. Elements including these cause surveyors to misrepresent their true mixed identities.

Other surveys still do not allow for the selection of multiple races and instead have "mixed race" or "other" boxes. Collecting data on "mixed race" individuals is less accurate and effective than collecting data on specific mixed populations by allowing multiple race selections.

Multiracial individuals can serve as bridges between racial groups by showing how arbitrary racial categories are. However, they can just as easily be used to enforce barriers in the same way that legislation simplified racial identities in the past by being put into one racial category instead of being viewed as having both identities. Mixed race individuals also can feel unconnected or ostracized from their

racial identities.

At Acalanes, mixed race individuals are a minority. Still, they are an important aspect of the community and can not be overlooked or lumped into other ethnic groups. According to *EdData*, a partner of the California Department of Education, mixed race students make up about one-tenth of Acalanes' population and are one-third of the school's minority population.

When I am in a less diverse space, such as Lafayette, I find that my identity is viewed differently than when I am in spaces with more diversity. In less diverse spaces, I often feel I receive less trust, attention, and grace than my white peers. I often get comments on how well spoken I am.

On a national level, mixed race identities have had a large yet quiet role in the presidential election. Vice President Kamala Harris' biracial identity has taken a backseat in her presidential campaign. Despite this, opponents have called into question her racial identity, claiming that she switches races to whatever she feels will benefit her. A lot of this criticism comes from her code-switching, the alternating in the language or types of language used in conversation, depending on whether or not she is in a setting where she can express certain parts of her identity. Code-switching is often a subconscious phenomenon.

For public figures like Harris, especially those who have multiple racial backgrounds, code-switching may seem disingenuous. During a rally in Atlanta, Harris was criticized by *Fox News* for putting on an "accent" to appeal to a more Black audience, which other opponents of Harris echoed. They also claimed that Kamala had only recently begun identifying as Black to boost her chances in the election. This criticism is false as Kamala has identified in the past as Black and even went to Howard University, a historically Black college. Furthermore, this reveals the continued lack of willingness to view individuals as multiracial and to instead just see everyone as a single identity.

In order to solve problems surrounding mixed-race identities, the government should promote and demonstrate more understanding regarding

mixed-race identities. Ethnic Studies will be a mandatory class for high school graduation in California, beginning in the 2025 through 2026 school year. This is a major step in helping educate on both the history of racial simplification and current racial identities. Acalanes has an incredibly strong Ethnic Studies program that teaches racial identity well by having students reflect on their own identities and listen to stories of others' racial identities.

In order to be taught correctly, Ethnic Studies currently requires a huge effort from teachers, such as in depth research, the creation of engaging lesson plans, and the careful discussion of sensitive topics. The state curriculum is a great resource for teachers who may not have the time to re-

search these topics. However, the curriculum needs improvement as it lacks specific details on the difference between ethnicity and race and the evolution of racial categories and fails to explain the unique experience of individuals who do not fit a single race. Acalanes teachers could help create a curriculum that details specific topics and the points needed to effectively teach them, allowing for better education and helping to include complex topics that may otherwise

get left out.

Proper education can work to combat the misconceptions around mixed race identities, producing a new generation of informed and understanding individuals. This better understanding will reduce the stigma and the ostracization around embracing multiple identities. Additionally, as understanding of complex identities spreads, those who hold influence in government will have the power and education to make important improvements in legislation and government policies, creating a society that is supportive of all, even those who do not fit into a single group.

The graphic is a tilted rectangular form with a light blue background. At the top, a black oval contains the text "Person 1". Below this, the form is divided into two main sections by a vertical line. The left section contains two questions, each with four checkboxes. The first question is "Is person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?" and the second is "What's Person 1's race?". The right section contains several horizontal lines for writing, with checkboxes placed to the left of each line. At the bottom of the left section, there is a section titled "Some other race" with a grid of eight small squares.

Is person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

What's Person 1's race?

White

Black or African Am.

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Some other race

Blueprint Graphic/Neve Murphy



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SPORTS



Empowering Youth and Uniting the Community Through Cheer

The sideline cheer team hosts its Mini Dons fundraiser

Cara Hamilton and Natalie Pecci | Staff Writers

Photo by Eily Roberts

As the buzzer goes off to signal the end of the first half of the football game, the cheer team runs out to the middle of the field to perform for the crowd. Among the cheerleaders are young kids getting their time to shine and cheer in front of their parents and other members of the community.

Under the bright Friday night lights on Oct. 11, the community gathered to watch around 90 elementary and middle school students cheer alongside Acalanes High School cheerleaders as part of the annual Mini Dons program.

Mini Dons is a week-long program that unites Acalanes with members of the community and concludes with the opportunity to cheer at the football game on Friday.

"We do everything that we do with the big girls in practice. So we stretch, we

learn our sideline cheers, [and] we learn a halftime routine which they perform at the game. We do play some more fun games for the little kids, but for the most part, we run practice exactly how we do for the big girls," sideline cheer Head Coach Faith McLeod said.

Mini Dons is not only a chance for young kids to get an idea of what high school cheer is like, but also serves as a fundraiser for the cheer program.

"The cheer [team is able to fund its] entire program for the year on that one fundraiser," Athletic Director Randy Takahashi said.

Mini Dons is able to raise important and necessary funds for the cheer team and is also a way to expose younger audiences to the cheerleading experience and inspire possible future Dons.

"I know we have lots of siblings from

the team that come [and] a lot of football [player's] siblings that like to join and cheer on at the game, which is really nice. We do like to encourage any and everyone to try out just so they get a feel of how cheer works, especially those that are going to be coming to Acalanes and might want to join the team in the future," McLeod said.

The cheer team plays an important role in organizing and running the entire program. They serve as role models for the kids and also coach the routine performed at halftime.

"We spend an entire week working with kids from kindergarten up to eighth grade, working towards the game on Friday. So we teach them cheers, we teach them dances, [and] we teach them motions and jumps ... We also teach them how to step," sideline cheer captain and senior Heloisa Mateus said.

The partnership between the kids and the high school students is a central component of the Mini Dons program.

"[The kids] really look up to [the cheerleaders], and it's really cute to see them interact together, and it helps their self-esteem to be cheering in front of a crowd," Mini Don's parent Angie Keehn said.

Some parents feel that the Mini Dons program provides their kids with an insight into what their futures might look like.

"I love the fact that my daughter gets to be with her friends but also gets to see what high school life is like. As well as what it is like to be a high school cheerleader and kind of [explore] what she wants to do when she comes here," Mini Dons parent and Digital Design teacher Chris Busse said.

The Mini Dons program has been uniting the Acalanes community for over ten years, and several of the current Acalanes cheerleaders were former participants in Mini Dons.

"One of our [current cheerleaders] ... actually did Mini Dons when she was little so that just goes to show that these Mini Dons could end up being one of our actual Acalanes cheerleaders one day," sideline cheer Assistant Coach Ariana Engelhaupt said.

The cheer team looks forward to continuing this program in the coming years, as it benefits both the cheer team and the community.

"I'm excited to do this again, this was my first year doing Mini Dons [and] first year [coaching] sideline, so I'm excited for next year," Engelhaupt said.




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Million Dollar Wins

Why "guarantee games" are vital to college football
William Miller | Staff Writer
Spread by Isaac Topp

Turn on the TV to catch the final moments of the University of Alabama versus Western Kentucky University game. Unsurprisingly, I see that the score is 63-0 with the obvious forerunner Alabama in the lead, causing me to wonder why a mostly unknown school like Western Kentucky would sign up to play against a multigenerational powerhouse like Alabama. Although they may seem useless, these lopsided games are actually beneficial to college football, helping both the larger and smaller programs in a multitude of ways.

In collegiate football, games like these are called "guarantee games." In these games, teams from the top four conferences, known as the Power Four, schedule games against opponents in weaker conferences like Group of Five or Football Championship Subdivision (FCS).

Power Four teams primarily schedule these games aiming for an easy win to get the team settled in for the year. Power Four universities pay top dollar for these games early in the season to tune up their play calling and work out any kinks they may have. These large programs, with the expectation of an easy win, aim to pack their stadiums and excite their fanbase.

This year, the University of Texas Austin (UT Austin) packed 100 thousand fans into the Austin Stadium and blew out the University of Texas San Antonio by 49 points. Following the game, they were ranked first in the nation by the Associated Press (AP) News.

Throughout the 2024 season, UT Austin has paid 4.9 million dollars for three games against weaker opponents. However, big programs, like UT Austin, get a return on investment through ticket sales and concessions, making the practice sustainable. UT Austin's football program earned more than \$55 million through ticket sales last season, surpassing the cost of these games.

Alternatively, the small programs get the rare opportunity for a big payday and media exposure, especially when national media attention is sparse. The large paychecks garnered from these "guarantee games" help the programs in a plethora of ways.

According to Scott MacDonald, San Jose State University (SJSU) Senior Deputy Athletic Director for External Operations, money from these "guarantee games" pays for overall expenses of the football program, and the rest goes to a general athletics fund. For programs like SJSU, funding is crucial, and the leftover revenue from these games helps bolster the entirety of the school's athletic programs. Therefore, by participating in games in which the odds of a loss are high but the paycheck is large, small football programs, as well as the whole athletics community at their school benefit.

While "guarantee games" can be perceived as boring due to the extremely high probability of the larger program winning, there is always the possibility of small teams upsetting more established programs. The most famous example of an upset game was the 2007 University of Michigan vs Appalachian State University (App State) game, in which FCS App State traveled to Michigan for their season opener. With a final score of 34-32 in favor of App State, Michigan not only lost the game, but lost 400,000 dollars and their dignity in the process.

"Guarantee games" are a place for lower-ranked programs to prove themselves, because when upsets do occur, getting a win over a Power Four opponent gives smaller programs national credibility, earning them a spot on the college football map. When playing in "guarantee games", these smaller teams get the rare opportunity to showcase their skills on national television, bolstering interest in the program.

The smaller programs do not even have to win these games to benefit. A close loss to a powerhouse team is still a massive feat as they prove they can compete with the best. For example, unranked Boise State had a close 34-37 loss to seventh-ranked University of Oregon. This game proved that Boise State could compete with the best, and following two wins Boise State entered the top 25 and has remained there since.

However, even though some small schools think having two or more of these "guarantee games" scheduled is good for the team's economics, some coaches believe they can make it more difficult for a team to get going at the beginning of the season. In an interview with AP News, Kent State University Vice President and Director of Athletics Randel Richmond expressed that he believes "guarantee games" can make it difficult for teams to gain momentum early on in the season.

Ultimately, "guarantee games" keep college football healthy because they provide needed revenue for smaller programs and the opportunity for lower-ranked teams to prove themselves on the big stage, while larger programs get to create hype for the upcoming season and garner a large home crowd.





Balancing Acts:

The Double Life of a Student-Athlete

Students navigate intense schedules and high expectations

Arman Craig and Max Trexler | Online Editor and Staff Writer

Spread by Audrey Martin

Every year, student-athletes from around the country experience high levels of pressure to strive for athletic and academic success. While many students juggle complex schedules, the normalization of staying busy through sports and school to the point of sacrificing the physical and mental health of students can be problematic.

High school athletes balance school, practice, and time for homework in order to maintain grades and eligibility for sports. The constant cycle of juggling activities often leads to unhealthy sleep habits and sacrificing social life and downtime. As a result, lots of student-athletes experience increases in stress and anxiety, which can easily result in burnout and an impact on mental health.

In a *Blueprint* survey, 95 percent of student-athlete respondents reported that they spent more than two hours on practice daily and 28 percent reported spending more than four hours on practice daily.

In the same survey, over 33 percent of student-athlete respondents noticed a significant drop in grades during the season compared to the offseason, demonstrating the impact sports can have on academic performance.

As for the sport itself, many athletes dedicate hours to their team each week. Lifting weights, watching game film, practicing, and game days are all essential to team success, however, each can take up a large portion of time.

Along with time commitments, underperforming can also become a large factor to not only how athletes play in games, but also their overall well-being. Due to the normalized culture of competing in sports, not playing up to par can greatly affect a person's life.

According to the same *Blueprint* survey, 75 percent of student-athlete respondents reported an increase in stress during the season, indicating

higher levels of pressure put on these athletes not only to compete at a high level but to also maintain life around it.

Despite these challenges, being a student-athlete also comes with its advantages. Many student-athletes learn valuable skills throughout their time in high school including showing up on time, multi-tasking, and a better understanding of how to work as a team.

At Acalanes, participating in athletics allows students to meet new people from different grades and social groups who share similar interests. Underclassmen are mentored by their upperclassmen, receiving valuable advice and hearing fun stories of their experiences. Years later as upperclassman, these same athletes can give back to the community, mentoring younger athletes. Having a larger network of friends and people on campus can create a better high school experience.

Furthermore, physical activity in sports also promotes a healthy lifestyle which can ultimately support life outside of sports. According to John Hopkins Medical Center, exercise can help improve sleep quality. So although students might receive less quantity of sleep per night, they actually receive a higher quality of sleep contributing to more focus the following day. Although athletics and academics often contradict each other, they can make each side of the student stronger. Athletics enhances brain activity and gives students a much-needed break from a stressful academic life, overall aiding their academic success. While academics can improve brain performance and concentration which translates over in games.

Overall, balancing both sports and academics can be a challenge, however finding a way to sustain both can lead to great success in the future. Understanding the importance of being both a great student and athlete is essential to maintaining a balanced life.



SPORTS BEATS

Cross Country

Olivia Foster | Head Section Editor



Contributing Photo/Jackie Leidy
Dash Tinianow overtakes the competition.

With a couple of invitationals under their belt, the cross country team looks to advance through the Diablo Athletic League (DAL) meets to the North Coast Section (NCS) Championship.

As the season is coming to a close, the team has shown significant growth.

"Everyone seems to be progressing along pretty well ... it seems like people are getting stronger and faster and more confident," Head Coach Jeff Hutson said.

Despite the competitiveness of challenging fields and courses, the team conquers the distance with the help of one another.

"People like to ask me ... 'how could you just run five miles after school?' ... It's all because I'm running with these people and ... We push each other by being able to hang out with each other ... overall it's a really good community," senior Charlotte Sutherland said.

Flag Football

Gwyneth Lee | Staff Writer



Contributing Photo/Isaiah Castillo
Isabelle Agnost rushes upfield.

Meeting the end of its second ever season, the women's flag football team (8-11 overall, 3-7 league) put up strong

performances and reflected on a successful season.

On Oct. 16, the Dons faced College Park in a league game, losing 6-26. The game was followed by back-to-back losses against Northgate.

The Dons faced off against Berean Christian on Oct. 30, winning 33-13 and snapping their brief losing streak.

On Nov. 2 the Dons rematched Northgate High School in the DAL Championship semi-finals, and won 13-12. However, they fell short of the DAL Championship title, losing 7-27 against Clayton Valley in their final game.

Flag football is still a growing sport at Acalanes. In the two years the program has been at the school, the team has grown immensely and will continue to grow in the years to come.

Football

Maya Stafford | Print Arts Editor



Blueprint Photo/Isaac Topp
Josh Elerts warms up for the game against Miramonte.

With a significant amount of rookie starters and new senior leadership, the football team (7-2 overall, 3-0 league) has been working hard to finish out a good season.

The Dons remain undefeated in league matchups, beating Miramonte on Oct. 11. They then beat rival Campolindo 21-12 on Nov. 1. This win ended a four year losing streak against the Campolindo.

Nearing the end of their season, the defending state champions hope to carry out their legacy in the 2024 NCS portion of their season.

"Our goals are to win the league, NCS and state championship. We do that by playing our best football in October, November and December," Head Coach Floyd Burnsed said.

Men's Water Polo

Owen Curley | Staff Writer



Contributing Photo/Will Mrachek
Fisher Bradford-Urban looks for a pass.

As the men's water polo team's (10-14 overall, 0-5 in league) season wanes, they make a late push for the playoffs.

The Dons season started off strong, maintaining a winning record for most of the year. This was a big step up from the team's record from the previous season as they matched last year's total wins in only eight games. Heading into October, it looked like the Dons were bound to make the playoffs until they went on a six game losing streak.

They entered the slump on Sept. 24 against James Logan High School with a 15-7 loss on and continued until the Dons upset Alhambra High School with a 12-9 win on Oct. 21.

On Oct. 25, the team continued to bounce back, defeating San Marin High School 11-9 in their last non-league game. For the first time since 2021, the Dons are eligible for the NCS playoffs.

"A successful season [would mean] continuing to improve ... The boys have done an incredible job to put themselves in this position, and are continuing to look better each game," Head Coach Nick Jordan said.

Unified Soccer

Molly Jones | Photo Story Editor



Courtesy Photo/Eric Morford
Leah Quintella and a Unified Partner celebrate after a goal.

Unified Sports kicked off the year with the start of their soccer season. The team is composed of Unified Athletes, students receiving Special Education services and Unified Partners, general education student volunteers. The team has already played against Miramonte and Pittsburg High Schools.

Athletes participate in two practices a week and up to four games throughout the season. Various other schools compete against the Acalanes Unified team which typically takes place during lunchtime at the home team's school.

The program, which was brought to Acalanes in 2016, gives Essential Skills students the opportunity to engage in sports as well as participate in activities with their peers.

"I think it's essential because it allows everyone to participate in sports, especially because athletics are big here at Acalanes. It adds inclusion and lets everyone play sports regardless of any limitations or challenges they may face. It gives all students a chance to do something they love," Unified Partner and junior Sofia Fernandez said.

Women's Golf

James Hanzel | Staff Writer



Courtesy Photo/Eric Morford
Campbell Evans putts.

As the women's golf team (5-4 overall, 4-4 league) season comes to a close, they look back at their season and strong senior class.

On Oct. 21 at DAL Championships at Blue Rock Springs Golf Course, the team finished third in the championship and third overall in league standings, highlighted by fifth and sixth place finishes from Haley and *Hana Chelemedos, respectively. The sisters have qualified for the individual NCS Championship, and the team hopes for a school-record fourth straight team NCS berth.

Although this team was built around its star seniors, there is still lots of hope for the future, and the team looks forward to many successful years.

"We are definitely graduating a lot of experience with Haley and Hana Chelemedos and Campbell Evans, but there is a lot of experience remaining with Taylor Baker, Miracle Gu, Jordan Huskins, and Grace Wolpert, and there are a handful of promising JV players who will

move up to varsity. The outlook is bright," *Head Coach Roger Chelemedos said.

Women's Tennis

Jake Colaco | Head Section Editor



Contributing Photo/Arielle Sears
Kate Widmann serves the ball.

The women's tennis team (4-8 overall, 2-6 league) ends their regular season on a high note, hitting their stride in the last few matches.

On Oct. 10, The Dons traveled to rival Campolindo but lost 0-9. Nonetheless, the team bounced back on Oct. 15, beating Las Lomas at home with a score of 6-3. The team came together with strong coaching to find themselves back on the winning side.

The Dons traveled to Northgate on Oct. 17, suffering a close loss of 4-5. On Oct. 22, the Dons had their senior night where they took on College Park for the second time this season, and ended the year with a tremendous 9-0 win.

"We had a lot of support and cheering during these [senior night] matches, and I think this definitely boosted team morale," team captain and senior Piper Duff said.

The team ended its season with some athletes participating in the DAL's tournament on Oct. 29, and despite playing hard, ultimately no athletes moved on to the semifinals.

Women's Volleyball

Jake Colaco | Head Section Editor



Courtesy Photo/Eric Morford
The volleyball team discusses the game.

The women's volleyball team (16-14 overall, 7-3 league) finished the regular season strong and made it to the first round of NCS playoffs.

On Oct. 10, the Dons faced Northgate and won 3-2. Despite winning in their previous encounter with rivals Campolindo, on Oct. 15 the Dons lost the rematch 0-3.

The loss to Campolindo was short-lived, as the Dons bounced back on senior night two days later, defeating Las Lomas 3-1.

On Oct. 22, the Dons followed up their win over Las Lomas with a tremendous 3-0 win against Miramonte in their regular season finisher. Unfortunately, the Dons lost their league playoff game in a rematch against Northgate two days later with a score of 0-3.

On Oct. 29, the Dons played hard but ended their season losing 1-4 against Windsor High School in NCS playoffs.

Women's Water Polo

James Hanzel | Staff Writer



Blueprint Photo/Justin Rosenblatt
Ella Del Rosario shoots the ball.

The women's water polo team (18-6 overall, 2-2 league) continues to dominate as they finish up the regular season and look ahead to NCS playoffs.

On Oct. 8, the Dons conquered league rival Las Lomas 8-2, but were defeated the next day by Miramonte 5-11 on Oct. 9.

On Oct. 16 the Dons began a winning streak first going to Northgate and defeated the Broncos with a score of 13-7. The Dons then defeated Tamalpais High School at Acalanes on Oct. 22, ending with a score of 15-3. They continued to roll with wins against Monte Vista, Colivis West and San Ramon Valley.

The team ended their regular season with a unfortunate loss of 7-11 against Campolindo.

The team's ability to grow from its losses has been instrumental in its successes this season.

"Our key to success this year would be to continuously take feedback from [Coach] Misha and always grow from our losses that can make us a stronger team as the year goes on," senior Maddie Walsh said.

***Blueprint would like to acknowledge that Hana Chelemedos and Roger Chelemedos are related to Haley Chelemedos, a member of Blueprint staff.**

ATHLETES OF THE ISSUE



Contributing Photo/Maya Kayiran
Piper Duff prepares for her match on senior night.

Piper Duff

Sophie Chinn | Online Editor-in-Chief

As the women's tennis team (4-8 league, 2-6 overall) wraps up its season, senior Piper Duff is proven to be a distinct driving force behind the team's spirit and success.

In her role as captain, Duff does more than excel athletically; she brings a sense of unity to the team through her enthusiastic energy and dedication to bonding the Dons.

"One of her huge strengths is that she is the unofficial cheerleader and chief. She bonds the team with all sorts of activities. She is constantly upbeat and always positive. She is invaluable when it comes to motivating us," women's tennis Assistant Coach Joe Schottland said.

Beyond her leadership skills, Duff's athletic abilities are equally impressive.

"Piper is an amazing tennis player. She has some of the craziest baseline shots with so much power and her serves are amazing and so accurate," women's tennis captain and senior Sienna Moise said.

Her coaches and teammates alike highlight her work ethic and commitment.

"She is a workhorse. She gets it done, and that shows in how she deals with very strong opponents," Schottland said.

Duff has shaped the team's culture, setting a standard for both performance and leadership.

"Piper is a great role model for a lot of the underclassmen on the team, and that will not only be helpful this year, but her legacy will stay with the team even after she graduates," Schottland said.

Harry Zimmerman

Haley Chelemedos | Print Managing Editor and Print Head of Layout

As the cross country team heads into the Diablo Athletic League and North Coast Section Championships, junior Harry Zimmerman stands out on the men's side with dominant performances and strong leadership.

Zimmerman has shown remarkable improvement during his time on the cross country team, constantly achieving new personal records. His determination to improve reflects his strong work ethic.

"He never ever sells himself short in effort, which is a very unique quality for an athlete, especially a runner. His results show, he puts it all out there and lets the clock do the talking," cross country Head Coach Jeff Hutson said.

While Zimmerman is committed to achieving his own goals, he also prioritizes uplifting and inspiring his teammates, embodying the characteristics of a true team player.

"In addition to being a top-15 runner in the division, Harry is such an encouraging person and is always positive," senior Nathan Joseph said.

Coaches and teammates recognize his growth throughout his years leading the cross country team and the distance squad of track and field. He has developed both physically and mentally, demonstrating increased leadership and support along the way.

"[Sports are] always revealing things about ourselves, and those that get the most out of it are the ones that put the work into it. Harry's a great example of putting a lot of work in and seeing the results both on the course and in his own personal life," Hutson said.

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Contributing Photo/Jackie Leidy

Harry Zimmerman runs the three mile at the second Diablo Athletic League meet.



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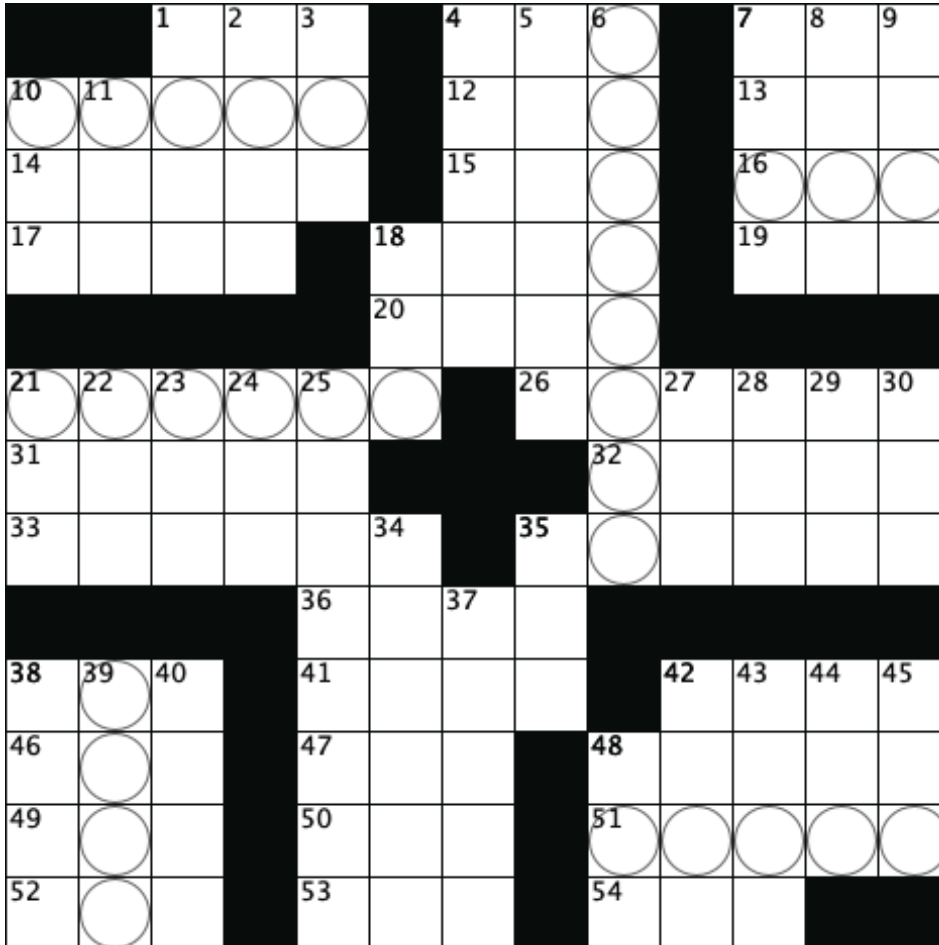
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Crossword

Created by Sameed Marco, Neve Murphy, and Nico Roig | Head Crucerverbalists

An anticipation of Thanksgiving, there are festive words hidden in the crossword. Good luck!



Across

1. To change (abbr.)
4. Bouncers collect these (abbr.)
7. Writing utensil
10. Mashed potato topper
12. Common negation
13. Rock holding a valuable resource
14. A thick blend of fruits and vegetables
15. Seasonal sickness
16. Could be apple, pumpkin, or pecan
17. A perfect collegiate gymnastics routine would receive ____
18. Sport with lots of clubs
19. Opposite of beginning
20. Where a college student might find short term work opps.
21. Country bordering Syria, Iraq, and Bulgaria
26. Tom _____, young Voldemort
31. Typical
32. People without religion
33. Soft
35. To be horrified or shocked
36. Small hotels
38. Popular insect repellent brand
41. The Egyptian god of creation
42. What an excavator does
46. Tool for cultivating soil and pulling weeds
47. Opposite of stand
48. Helped
49. Charged particle
50. Anger
51. What a circular object does
52. Unusual, strange
53. One of Lafayette's elementary schools, for short
54. "Do or do not, there is no _____"

Down:

1. A female horse
2. Where baking happens
3. Color-changing agent
4. "They don't know what they're _____"
5. One is Washington, ten is Hamilton
6. What fills a teddy bear
7. Resident of the Vatican
8. _____ Andrews, sideline reporter
9. A necessity
10. Students strive for a 4.0 _____
11. Indent from tire
18. _____ Fieri, host of "Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives"
21. To pull aggressively
22. To employ
23. A point, in baseball
24. With Kit, a Halloween snack
25. Three dots to omit text
27. Homer Simpson's catchphrase
28. Molecule containing genetic info
29. _____ *Miserables*, Victor Hugo's novel
30. NYC's time zone
34. The whole thing
35. Fire residue
37. Diaz, Bargatze, and Ruess are some
38. The Buckeye state
39. _____ for thought
40. To provide for oneself
42. French fashion company
43. Inactively
44. Hair product
45. Producers of "MLB the Show"
48. Music, painting, and dance are all forms of this



Check Blueprint online for Crossword answers!

Photo of the Issue

Location: Machu Picchu

Molly Jones

Print Photo Story Editor



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